Sandwell
CHRONICLE

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Chiefs amazed by community support following raid

PEOPLE POWER GIFT FOR HOME

Report by Jamie Brassington

A CARE home has been inundated with gifts after burglars raided all of its Christmas presents.

Bosses say they have been amazed by the level of community support.

Burglars made off with elderly residents' presents at the Tividale care home last week, a day before their annual Christmas party.

But kind members of the local community rallied to the aid of the home, ensuring the party would go on. They have donated gifts, ranging from money to chocolates to wine, as well as making surprise visits to the home.

Kal Jagpal, Home Manager of Warrens Hall Nursing Centre, said: "We are so appreciative of all the support, from local businesses, friends and relatives and even from passers-by and complete strangers.

"All the donations meant that we could still hold our Christmas party last week – it was a huge success. I also want to thank my staff for going the extra mile, I am very proud of everything they have done for our residents."

Among those who donated were local businesses.

Lorraine Crumpton, Customer Service Assistant at the Co-Op in Rowley Regis, first heard the call for help, after a care home staff member visited the shop. She said: "One of their staff from the care home came in and told me what had happened on the morning.

Collection

"I personally asked the manager to donate to the home, and we then we donated gifts to the home. I phoned the home early on the morning, and asked if someone could come up and collect the gifts, and they did. My mother-in-law is in a care home and the thought of that happening to her, I would have been gutted."

The Co-op store donated chocolates, mince pies, cakes, biscuits and sweets. Tesco Express in Rowley Regis is currently holding a money collection to fund raise for the home, organised by store manager Lissa Raeside.

Staff first heard of the burglary through the sister of employee Jackie Parsons, who works at the home. Ms Parsons, team leader at the store, said: "My sister asked if our shop could donate some items, because it is getting close to Christmas. I then went and asked my manager Lissa if we could help out, and she organised everything from there.

"Lissa has done really well, she has been absolutely brilliant. She has really got into the festive spirit. We really appreciate what she has done." Staff members held a 'Share a Smile' money collection yesterday, alongside a raffle and £40 worth of gifts being sent to the home.

TONY'S ON TARGET FOR PUB'S £100K RELAUNCH

WBA hero Tony Brown dropped into the reopened Sow and Pigs pub in West Bromwich following the refurbishment

ALBION legend Tony 'Bomber' Brown was on hand for the relaunch of a West Bromwich pub following a £100,000 refurbishment.

The former footballer and club record scorer was invited to The Sow and Pigs, in Hill Top, by its new owners to pull a few pints for the regulars.

The pub was bought by Richard Bartram and his business partner Ron Morgan in August after being saved from demolition.

The pair brew their own beers under the name Two Crafty Brewers, in conjunction with Sadler's Brewery, which is based in Lye.

The revamp took four months, but the pub was only remained closed for four days.

Mr Bartram said: "There is a big Albion following in the pub and Tony was very accommodating on the night, answering lots of questions.

"We're still adding the finishing touches to the pub but it's taken about four months to complete the majority of the revamp."

The two-room drinking house originally started off its life as a Banks's premises and had been a free house for around a decade, before being given a full refurbishment.

Tony with a photograph from his playing days

HEALTH

Leader backs signing of hospital contract

SANDWELL Council leader Darren Cooper has hailed the signing of a contract for the new super hospital in Smethwick as 'superb news'. Midland Met Hospital has been given the final go-ahead after contracts were officially ratified.

Councillor Cooper said the news of the 600-plus bed super hospital being approved by Government was 'magnificent' for the borough and its people. He believes it will play a big part in the development of Cape Hill.

● Richardsons – Page 3

EMERGENCY

Kitchen damaged in blaze at home

A KITCHEN was badly damaged in a house fire in Walsall. It took 15 firefighters to deal with the blaze at Gillity Avenue, near Daisy Bank.

Crews from Walsall and Bloxwich stations arrived shortly after the flames were reported around 3.20pm. The fire started in a ground floor electrical cupboard. No-one was in at the time. Western Power isolated the electric supply. The blaze, on Saturday, left the kitchen 40 per cent damaged from fire and 60 per cent damaged from smoke.

CAROLS

Oak House turns festive clock back

HEAR some of the oldest surviving carols played on medieval, renaissance and baroque instruments at a special music evening at Oak House Museum, West Bromwich, on Saturday.

You'll also be able to hear some of the oldest surviving English songs. Nightwatch: Singing the Seasons is a celebration in 13th to 18th century music. Doors open at 6pm for event at the museum in Oak Road. The concert starts at 7pm.

Tickets cost £6 or £5 with concessions (over 65s/Friends of the Oak House). Arrive from 6pm and you can check out the Oak House decorated for Christmas.

INSIDE

TRAIN-ING FOR THE BIG EVENT

PAGE 3

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CONTENTS

PETER RHODES	4
LETTERS	7
MEMORY LANE	12
FAST TICKET	23
TV	24
PUZZLES	27
PROPERTY	28
SPORT	35-36

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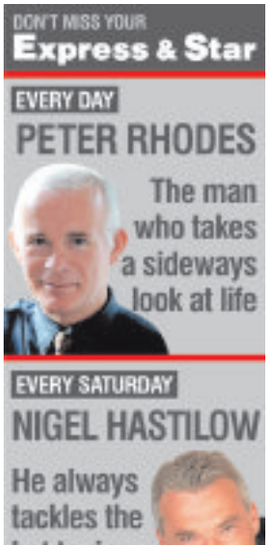

Skinner's a winner with radio honour

Inductee – Frank Skinner

BLACK Country comic Frank Skinner had a bostin' time being named in the radio Hall of Fame. The stand-up comic turned radio presenter was among the names inducted into the Radio Academy's Hall of Fame during a ceremony in Birmingham. He received the honour for his weekly Saturday morning show on Absolute Radio.

Former Radio WM and BRMB presenter Tony Butler was also honoured at the event held at Resorts World, near Birmingham's NEC last week.

They joined broadcasters including Radio One DJ Pete Tong and former Radio 5Live and BRMB presenter Victoria Derbyshire being inducted during the lunchtime event.

Skinner, aged 58, a keen West Brom fan who grew up in Oldbury, saw the show win Best Speech Programme in 2014 and Best Entertainment Programme at the Radio Academy Awards.

He said: "When I heard I was to become a Hall of Famer, I felt properly proud. Does this mean I'll finally get my publicity postcard in the reception area? The one with me looking preoccupied, in headphones. My 'Mr Radio' jingle suddenly seems much less ironic."

Wolverhampton-born Tony Butler, 80, was the first sports editor of BRMB in 1974 and introduced the football phone-in. In 1987 he moved to Radio WM, hosting the breakfast show. He retired from radio in 2012. Radio One DJ Pete Tong Pete said he was ' truly flattered' by the honour, adding: "I'm a huge fan of the medium which at its best is still so simple so powerful and so personal."

Previous inductees have included Trevor Nelson, Nick Ferrari, Annie Nightingale, Margherita Taylor and John Peel.

Santa Dave hits out at Bah Humbug Bullring

IT was a case of 'Bah Humbug Bullring' when a pensioner was turned away from the Birmingham shopping centre because he was dressed as Santa.

David Upson, aged 69, known in Bearwood as 'Santa Dave', was spending the day in the city centre dressed in his Santa costume to bring festive cheer to shoppers and workers.

Dave Upson in his Santa suit

However, upon going into the Bullring last Wednesday he says he was stopped by security guards at the centre and told he was not allowed to enter in his costume 'as it was private property'.

Mr Upson has since gone on to post his experience on Facebook, which has now been shared by friends and supporters of Santa Dave more than 5,000 times – with the centre being labelled as 'Scrooges'.

The retired land surveyor said he was only planning to bring festive cheer to the centre but was stopped by the brass bull before he even got inside. He said: "Two security guards came to me and kindly said that I would not be allowed in the centre.

"I was shocked as I then went over to Grand Central and they were lovely to me and allowed me to come in and sit down and have a coffee in there – it was completely different. All in all I had a wonderful afternoon it was just so sad that the incident happened with the Bullring. I have received no apology or response from the Bullring to explain any of this neither."

Mr Upson's daughter, Darice Bailey, said: "My Dad has been Santa Dave for 16 years and he does it out of the kindness of his heart – with no money gain."

Sophie Diner, spokeswoman from the Bullring, said: "Our customers are welcome to walk through the centre in costumes, especially at this time of year. However, if any of our visitors in costume wish to engage with other customers' children for photographs, there are of course certain procedures that need to be applied to protect all involved. "

Library demolition gets under way

Crowds gather to watch as Birmingham's old central library is demolished as part of the revamp

THE demolition of Birmingham's old central library has begun, as part of a £500 million revamp of the city centre. The building, which has been a feature of the city's skyline for four decades, will be knocked down as part of the ongoing Paradise regeneration.

It was stripped inside ahead of the demolition which started last week with crowds gathering to witness the historic moment. However, the library will not be completely bulldozed until autumn next year.

Councillor Tahir Ali said: "To be able to witness the visible progress of the Paradise scheme is the icing on the cake at the end of an incredible 2015. This has been a truly remarkable year for the city with the £600m re-opening of New Street station, £150m launch of Grand Central shopping centre with its John Lewis store, as well as the £50m redevelopment of The Mailbox and opening of the £150m Resorts World Birmingham leisure complex.

"The Paradise development will further boost global perceptions of Birmingham as a prime place to live, visit and do business."

Thousands of tenants evicted in Black Country

LANDLORDS in the Black Country filed more than 3,000 court claims to evict tenants in 12 months.

The Ministry of Justice figures show that people who live in rented properties in Wolverhampton, Dudley and Sandwell are among the most at risk of being booted out of their homes in the West Midlands. Homelessness charity Shelter has expressed fears for the increasing numbers facing eviction.

Between October 1, 2014, and September 30 this year, landlords issued 1,075 repossession claims in Sandwell – a rate of one in every 49 rented homes in the borough, equal with Birmingham.

During the same period there were 898 court applications in Wolverhampton – one in 50 properties; and 753 in Dudley –one in 54 properties.

Out of 30 areas in the West Midlands, the three Black Country boroughs ranked fourth, fifth and sixth respectively as the most at risk areas for residents renting their homes.

Alison Mohammed, director of services at Shelter, said: "Every week, hundreds of people in the region receive a notice through the door with the devastating news that they might lose their home.

"Our advisers will be working nonstop over the festive period to support families at risk of losing their home – but sadly our helpline is receiving a huge number of calls and our services are straining under the demand.

"We desperately need more support from the public to help us be there for these families."

Governor steps down from role

A WEST Bromwich school governor has retired after 22 years of service.

Alan Hobday, was Chair of the Governing Body of All Saints C of E Primary School, in Wilford Road. Staff past and present joined together to thank him for his services to the school and children in a special ceremony held on Dec 3.

Mr Hobday said: "It has been such a pleasure to work for a school with such wonderful staff and children. After 22 enjoyable years I find it's time to now retire but will always stay in touch with the school."

Head teacher, Jackie Beech, said that Mr Hobday had been a committed member of the team. "As head teacher I thank Alan for volunteering to support the staff and children of the school. He is well principled, fair and good natured."

Cat rescue charity calls for food tins

WOLVERHAMPTON Cat Rescue has launched its annual Christmas appeal. The charity is asking for donations of cat food, preferably tinned.

The food can be taken to the shop at 10 Marsh Lane Parade,in Fordhouses. For a pick-up call 07847 360784.

Payback offenders in rubbish crackdown

OFFENDERS doing community payback spent more than 1,200 hours clearing rubbish from 'grotspots' across Sandwell during a six-week campaign.

More than 33 tons of waste was cleared away as part of this year's Safer 6 campaign.

The offenders, who are supervised by Staffordshire and West Midlands Community Rehabilitation Company, picked up rubbish and tidied up overgrown bushes and paths from 14 sites.

Council leader Darren Cooper said: "It's good to see offenders giving something back to the local community as part of their court sentences.

"At the same time, they have cleaned up 'grotspots' across the borough as part of the Safer 6 campaign, making a difference to the look of the area."

Waste was recovered from four sites in Wednesbury, two in Tividale, three in Tipton and two in West Bromwich along with other streets in Oldbury and a notorious hotspot in Smethwick – Shireland Road.

Earlier in the year, mattresses, beds and even bags of manure were dumped at the fly-tipping hotspot which backs onto Shireland Passage.

The unsightly mess had appeared within three weeks of Sandwell Council clearing the last mess, with unhappy business owners claiming it was having an effect on trade.

Piles of garden waste, soil and black bags full of household waste were also seen piled high at the end of the passageway on Shireland Road.

Security upped as travellers move in

GATES on playing fields in West Bromwich have been secured after travellers broke onto the site for the second time in just weeks.

An illegal camp set up on Churchfields in Newton Road stopped children's football matches being played.

The clean-up of the site has cost more than £500, with concrete blocks now put in place to deter a recurrence. Councillor Paul Moore said: "It's not fair on the football teams who use the fields to have their matches called off and the grass damaged."

The travellers were removed from the site after the council worked with the police to serve notice on them.

This order banned them from the site and anywhere within a three mile radius.

Nice touch to pub comedy evening

COMEDIAN Barbara Nice, who appeared on Peter Kay's Phoenix Nights, will headline the stand-up comedy night at the Newhampton Inn, Wolverhampton on December 16. Tickets are £6 or £10 with food.

Action on restaurant parking issues

Badshah Palace, on Walsall Road

ACTION has been taken over motorists blocking roads and driveways near a restaurant in Great Barr.

Double yellow lines will be put in place to stop vehicles from parking inconsiderately outside Badshah Palace, on the A34 Walsall Road. The restaurant has also applied for a music licence, which councillors hope will bring clearer rules and regulations for operation.

In November, nearby residents labelled the issues as 'escalating out of control', saying that the Tower Hill site, which is the former Clifton Bingo Hall, had been plagued with parking problems since opening a year ago.

It was claimed that visitors were blocking the entrance to the West Midlands Ambulance Service hub and to the Co-op store. They said it was difficult to park near their homes and sometimes they could not get on to their driveways.

Perry Barr ward councillor Jon Hunt said: "There has been a couple of things going on to make it clearer for visitors for where they can and cannot park. Double yellow lines will be put in place to stop vehicles parking on the corner. The lines will send messages to visitors that they cannot park there," he added.

In May motorists had also been caught on camera parking across the entrance to Tower Hill ambulance station, blocking in emergency vehicles. Mohammed Mamunur Rashid, managing director of Badshah Palace, said that they were working alongside residents and were in favour of the council's help.

However, Mr Rashid stated that they were not invited to a recent meeting held by councillors.

Richardsons backing super-hospital scheme

A NEW super hospital for the Black Country will be built backed by money from the region's most famous family of property developers – the Richardsons.

Twins Roy and Don built the Merry Hill shopping centre back in the 1980s.

Don died in 2007 and Roy, at 85, now takes a back seat but his sons – Carl, Lee and Martyn – continued to build Oldbury-based Richardsons Capital.

The family has now taken part in a joint venture with Wolverhampton-based Carillion to build the £430 million Midland Metropolitan Hospital in Smethwick.

It will see Richardsons investing £12m in the project, alongside £16m from Carillion and £3m from the Treasury under the first of a new generation of public private partnership deals, dubbed PF2. The joint venture was chosen in August by the Sandwell & West Birmingham Hospitals NHS Trust as the preferred bidder to deliver the project.

Richardsons and Carillion have worked together on a number of previous projects, such as the Freeman's Reach development in Durham city centre and the £75 million St Martin's Quarter scheme in Worcester.

Reasons

But Mark Morgan, the head of property for Richardsons Capital, said the latest project is one close to the family's heart.

"One of the main reasons we got involved in the project was because of those local links, providing a major hospital for the area. There was a wish from the family to support the local community. I think those local links were one of the reasons why we were chosen for the project. We had to take part in a competitive process to become one of the investors and, alongside the funding, suitability was a major consideration."

The company, founded more than six decades ago by Don and Roy, has expanded to handle schemes across Europe, Canada and even India, but has retained its local roots with its offices remaining at Birchley Island in Oldbury.

Richardsons will now be overseeing the work on the state-of-art Metropolitan Hospital, which will have around 670 beds and 15 operating theatre suites. "Our role will be to make sure everything is going to plan, and that the hospital is completed on time and on budget," Mr Morgan said.

Warley Model Railway Club chairman Alf Fantham, of Kings Norton, holding limited edition Mastico 00 gauge wagon model

Fans all steamed up with display

THOUSANDS of people packed out Birmingham's NEC as a Black Country club hosted the UK's largest model railway exhibition.

The Warley National Model Railway Exhibition saw visitors from far and wide. Ex-Pop Idol judge Pete Waterman, a regular visitor to the show, was also in attendance. The music mogul and Walsall supporter is a model railway fanatic.

There was something extra special for visitors from the Black Country to feast their eyes on, with models of a train from West Bromwich-based Mastico W Keays, which ran between West Bromwich and Portishead between the 1920s and 60s on display, one in pristine condition and one weathered. It offered enthusiasts the chance to add to their collection, with 500 on sale at the event.

David Moorhouse, publicity officer for the Warley Model Railway Club, said: "This is the premier UK model railway event, with 90 layouts and 170 train stables. It was very successful. This year was right up there with one of the best we've ever had."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Cycling Santas in fundraising saddle

CYCLING Santas raised more than £200 for Birmingham Children's Hospital with a charity bike ride through the city centre.

Twenty five cyclist donated £5 each to join the ride.

The route followed the Birmingham and Fazeley Canal towpath to Digbeth then crossed Eastside Park and Aston University campus en route to Birmingham Children's Hospital in Steelhouse Lane.

This was the third time Centro has organised the Christmas charity ride, each for a different good cause.

Mental health is in the spotlight

THE challenges facing mental health care in the future were discussed at a forum. The event at Lapal House in Halesowen was chaired by charity Re-Think Mental Illness' national Director for External Affair, Brian Dow.

Organised by Rowley Regis and Halesowen MP James Morris, it was attended by more than 20 people from Dudley CCG, Dudley Mind, Re-think Mental Illness Carers Group, local councillors and a GP.

Mr Morris said: "I think it is really important that we have these conversations."

Web address is passed to B&Q

A WEST Midlands builders' merchant which set up a website with a similar name to B&Q has been ordered to hand over the online address.

The DIY chain complained after Wednesbury-based Darlaston Builders Merchants registered the internet address 'bandqbricks.co.uk'.

An independent expert has now ordered the domain be handed over to B&Q. Expert Nick Phillips said B&Q had shown it had rights in a name 'identical or similar' to the address.

Market venue move with Banks's match

BESCOT Market will appear in Union Street, Wednesbury this Sunday, due to the rearranged Walsall v Port Vale football match live on Sky Sports at Banks' Stadium.

Their will, however, be an additional market at the home of Walsall FC the next day, Monday 21. All usual traders will be present at both so people can join in the festive fun. For further information please contact 07889 975 701 or email bescot.p@hotmail.co.uk

Cuppa and a chat

RETIRED residents can enjoy a cup of tea and a chat at an Oldbury event every Friday.

Free refreshments are served at Rounds Green Library from 10am until noon.

For further information call 0121 552 2879 or email roundsgreen_library@sandwell.gov.uk

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THE BEST OF PETER RHODES

WE need safe, secure, flood-proof homes on high, well-drained plots. We do not need to trim a piffling 20 minutes off the rail journey time from London to Birmingham. As Cumbria drowns, our beloved leaders are still preparing to spend £50,000 million or more on HS2. What a monumentally misguided set of priorities. Our grandchildren will think we were mad.

WINTER is icumin-in, so it's off to the annual pre-Xmas entertainment, an evening of mediaeval music with ye authentic olde instruments. These events are a reminder of how our horny-handed ancestors were prepared to suck, blow, pluck, crank, squeeze or wallop almost anything in the hope of getting a tune out of it. Hollowed-out gourds, stretched skins, reeds, lumps of wood and pigs' bladders were all pressed into service. This concert featured a bagpipe which looked like a hockey stick inserted in a dead badger. I bet you'd get much the same noise using a live badger. The one disadvantage of England defeating the Spanish Armada in 1588 was that it delayed the arrival of guitars, and proper music, for several centuries.

WHEN Donald Trump calls for a ban on all Muslims entering the United States, he is surfing on one of those occasional waves of paranoia that have swept America ever since it was first settled. From witches to flying saucers, via communists, alien abductions, Freemasons, Catholics and secret brain implants (can you feel it, just under your ear?), the US seems to need occasional panics and conspiracy theories. I can't think of any explanation for this desire to be frightened except that the US arms industry is enormous and every new panic surely sells more guns.

MIND you, when Trump alleges that cops are scared to enter some parts of London, the instant denial by the Metropolitan Police is unconvincing. Fact: most British towns and cities have their share of dodgy streets. I recall the Liverpool gag about a neighbourhood so tough that the police patrolled not in pairs but in threes – and that was inside the police station. This joke is at least 50 years old.

FIRST, those little peaked hats were known as Lenin caps after the leader of the Russian revolution. Then, when the Beatles adopted them, they became Lennon caps. As Britain became a member of the EU and we all got more continental, they were marketed as Breton fishermen caps. And now, favoured by the Labour Party leader, they are being sold on eBay as Corbyn caps. You can't help noticing how many men of a certain age are now wearing them. Or wondering whether they were bought in tribute to Vladimir, John, French fishermen or Jeremy.

Don't miss Peter Rhodes every Monday to Friday in your Express & Star

City hit-and-run victim is named

Surinder Kaur

A WOMAN who died in a hit-and-run in Birmingham has been named as Surinder Kaur. The 61-year-old was crossing the Soho Road in Handsworth outside the Guru Nanak temple on Friday, December 4, when she was struck by the car heading towards Birmingham.

The driver of the vehicle stopped at the scene after the incident at around 5.30pm but then drove away. Sergeant Paul Hughes from West Midlands Police's Collision Investigation Unit, urged the motorist to contact the police. The car involved is believed to be a Vauxhall Astra VXR Artic Edition, which is a limited edition model.

Photographs of the vehicle have been released by officers, with Sgt Hughes saying 'it has a very distinctive black roof and wing mirrors'.

"I would appeal to anyone who saw the vehicle on that day or has seen one since that day with similar damage to contact either myself or my team. In addition I would appeal direct to the driver of that vehicle to come forward. I know you stopped outside the temple and I know you got out of the vehicle and walked back towards the scene before driving away."

Anyone with information should contact the Collision Investigation Unit on 101 or Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555111.

CCTV view of the car said to be involved

Children's services chief is brought in

Report by David Cosgrove

A COMMISSIONER has been parachuted in to run Sandwell Council's beleaguered children's services department – with the authority given six months to improve.

The service was ranked inadequate by Ofsted inspectors in June, just two years after the same result triggered upheaval at the authority.

Eleanor Brazil has now been sent in by the Government to turn the department's performance around.

If notable improvement isn't made by the middle of 2016 then the running of the council's children's services could be taken out of its hands. Mrs Brazil was previously installed at Slough Council to try to turn around its struggling services. The appointment was announced as Prime Minister David Cameron revealed radical reforms for the area.

Under the new plans, any children's services rated inadequate by Ofsted must show 'significant improvement' within six months or be taken over by high-performing authorities, experts or charities. Councillor Simon Hackett, cabinet member for children's services, welcomed the commissioner's appointment.

Inadequate

Mr Cameron, who outlined the proposals, said: "Children's services support the most vulnerable children in our society.

"They are in our care – we, the state, are their parents; and we are failing them.

"It is our duty to put this right.."

High-performing local authorities, experts in child protection and charities will be brought in to turn children's services around – by acting as sponsors or forming 'trusts' to take over authorities judged to be failing. Education bosses in Sandwell were rocked by the latest inadequate rating in June, and contested the findings of the report. They insisted things had improved since the first critical report in 2013.

Council chiefs laid out a two-year plan to turn around children's services earlier this year – but will need to show serious improvements within six months.

Tower power set for city landscape

The 700-ft high Beorma Tower, which will be the tallest office building in Birmingham when completed

A 30-STOREY tower including shops, offices and apartments will be built in Birmingham city centre after plans were given the go-ahead.

The Beorma Tower would be the tallest office building in the city and stand more than 700ft high next to the Bullring and Selfridges. It will be the third tallest building on Birmingham's skyline, after the BT Tower and the Raddison Blu hotel. Each of the 125 homes will have a private 'winter garden' – an enclosed balcony area – offering spectacular views.

The proposals also include a smaller, seven-storey office building and a 13-storey building with 69 apartments and ground floor shops. The heart of the development is to be a new public square called Orwell Place. Work preparing the site for the new round of building will start later this month. The latest scheme will complete the £200 million Beorma Quarter development by property group Salhia Investments.

The first phase of the scheme – which included the refurbishment of the former Bullring Markets Coldstore building into an office complex and innovation centre as well as the development of a new Adagio hotel – was completed earlier this year.

Architect Broadway Malyan has designed the final phases of the Beorma Quarter, including the three new towers. The firm's Birmingham-based director, Neil Rose, said the latest phases reflected Salhia's confidence in the city's long term prospects.

Six months is wiped off jail term for sex monster

A SEX monster who raped a vulnerable woman then accused her of lying about it has had six months wiped off his jail term.

Benjamin Hezekiah O'Meally, aged 56, forced the victim to have sex with him while he was living at a bail hostel in Clay Lane, Langley. He was found guilty of rape and jailed for a minimum of nine years and three months at Wolverhampton Crown Court in 2009.

Earlier this year, he had an appeal against his convictions rejected by top judges but last week had his term cut by six months. O'Meally's sentence had wrongly been raised to take account of his breach of a sexual offences prevention order, according to Lord Justice Fulford.

"Albeit this matter has been raised many years after the sentencing, we consider that it would be unjust to leave this illegal element of the sentence undisturbed," he said.

In May, the London court heard O'Meally had threatened to kill the woman if she refused to have sex with him.

He also had previous convictions for rape and sexual assault, dating back to the 1990s.

Although his minimum term has been cut, O'Meally can only be freed at the end of it if the Parole Board is convinced he is not a danger to the public.

1,200 jobs may go at authority

UP to 1,200 jobs are set to be cut at Birmingham City Council, it has been revealed. The authority has launched a consultation ahead of another round of sweeping cuts to services.

According to public sector union UNISON, the proposals could see 1,200 jobs lost at the council. These proposals are likely to include a loss of 515 care assistants and therapists.

Caroline Johnson, Birmingham branch secretary of UNISON, said: "Birmingham City Council are in a very difficult position, they are the largest local authority in Britain and are having their budgets slashed and stretched to breaking point."

Council leader John Clancy said the authority would have to 'completely remodel and reimagine' the way it does things.

Town Hall talking date for rocker Iommi

BLACK Sabbath guitarist Tony Iommi is to take part in an Audience With-style show about his life in Birmingham in the new year.

The 67-year-old heavy metal legend will be interviewed at Birmingham Town Hall on March 19 by old friend and TV sports presenter Gary Newbon.

Tickets priced £17.50 went on sale from 10am on Friday, December 11.

Cuts to hit grants for Brum arts and venues

MAJOR cuts to funding arts venues and organisations in Birmingham are in the pipeline, after plans to reduce grants by a quarter were agreed.

Grants available to the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra, Birmingham Town Hall and Symphony Hall and Birmingham Rep Theatre are among those which will be hit.

Members of Birmingham City Council's cabinet agreed last Tuesday to cut its budget for supporting groups and attractions by 25 per cent from March next year.

Birmingham City Council cabinet members have agreed to cut £1.8 million from its Support to the Arts budget for 2016-17. This will see budgets fall from around £6.4m to £4.85m. But officials warned grants to the city council's budget may be cut by a further £1.6m in 2017/18.

In the report to cabinet members, deputy chief executive Paul Dransfield said: "The proposals to reduce funding for the arts in 2016-18 were included in the public consultation exercise accompanying last year's budget process."

He said discussions had been held to look at alternative funding arrangements in the future with venues and groups working together on bids for cash. "This concept has potential to attract new income, including funds from public, private and charitable sectors," Mr Dransfield said in the report.

Further discussions will be held with those organisations affected in the coming weeks.

MP visits U3A in library meet

MEMBERS of a social group hosted Halesowen and Rowley Regis MP, James Morris recently. Mr Morris visited University of the Third Age's exhibition in Halesowen Library.

Group members held an exhibition at the library, in the Cornbow Centre, to draw attention to the wide range of activities it offers. U3A is an educational and social organisation for people who are retired.

The Halesowen branch offers a fortnightly general meeting, usually with a speaker, together with 17 interest groups. June Carless from Halesowen U3A said: "We were delighted that James Morris could come to see our exhibition. The next general meeting is at Hasbury Methodist Church on January 6."

It Wood be sold out for Roy's gig

ROY Wood's gig in Wolverhampton this month has sold out. The Birmingham rocker, who founded Electric Light Orchestra and Wizzard, is playing at the Robin 2 in Bilston on December 20.

Cadbury owner defends tax record

Cadbury reception, Bournville

THE owners of Birmingham based Cadbury have defended the firm's record of investment after it was revealed the company paid no corporation tax last year – despite sales of more than £2 billion.

Mondelez International, the American firm which owns the chocolate company, legally avoided paying tax through a controversial exemption scheme even though Cadbury UK made almost £100m profit in 2014.

A Mondelez spokesman said: "In common with all global businesses, we pay corporation tax based on the laws of the countries in which we operate. We comply with all applicable tax legislation in the UK, and on a global basis we pay hundreds of millions of dollars in corporate income tax annually.

"Since 2010 we are proud to have invested over £200 million into both UK-based manufacturing and research and development supporting our 4,500 employees in the UK."

Previously known as Kraft Foods, Mondelez bought the Bournville-based chocolate company in 2010 for £11.5 billion. It then closed its Somerdale factory in Bristol, axing 400 jobs, and cut 200 more in the UK in 2012.

It emerged Mondelez is legally avoiding UK tax bills with the help of interest payments on an unsecured £8.2 billion debt listed as a bond on the Channel Islands stock exchange.

Cadbury UK made profits of £96.5m in the year to December 31, 2014. Its holding company, Cadbury Ltd – previously Cadbury plc – recorded a profit of £826m and paid dividends of £1.3 billion in the same year but paid no corporation tax.

Views sought on plan for hackney carriages

PEOPLE can now have their say on whether hackney carriage taxis should also be allowed in a bus and cycle-only zone proposed for part of West Bromwich town centre.

Sandwell Council wants to make New Street safer and easier for shoppers and students using the town centre.

The council has been consulting on proposals to introduce a bus and cycle only zone along 40 metres of New Street, outside Sandwell College's Central Sixth campus.

Many motorists are ignoring existing traffic restrictions on this stretch of road – and the new order would allow the council to use CCTV to enforce a ban on other vehicles.

The main town square between New Square and Central Sixth is already a pedestrianised area. Following some objections to the original proposals, the council is now consulting on whether Hackney Carriage taxis should be allowed in the zone. Councillor Maria Crompton, the council's cabinet member for highways and environment, said: "I met with objectors on 26 November.

Shoppers

After listening carefully to what they had to say, it was decided to consult on a proposal to also allow hackney carriages into the zone. We are required to carry out this further consultation before introducing the order.

"We want to improve safety and access for pedestrians, including shoppers, visitors and sixth formers, who currently face high volumes of traffic when crossing this road.

"Their safety is our top priority. Another priority is to cut congestion and delays to bus services at the bus station. The CCTV enforcement will ensure that traffic complies with the restrictions and is expected to reduce traffic volumes on New Street by three quarters.

"Our proposals will also benefit trade and will improve the town square area for events, street cafes and restaurants."

Sandwell Council adopted a revised traffic enforcement policy earlier this year, which included powers to use CCTV for enforcing traffic regulation orders in bus lanes and streets. Automated CCTV enforcement works by recording registration plates of vehicles. Details of the proposals are available on the council's website at www.sandwell.gov.uk/trafficregulations and at Sandwell Council House, Oldbury. Written objections should be sent by January 11, 2016.

Market trader Allen Poole, with his warning letter from the council

'Christmas time' – not, for trader

A MARKET trader from Great Barr who has run a flower stall for more than 40 years has been warned he faces court action if he doesn't stop playing Christmas carols.

Allan Poole, aged 53, runs his stall in Birmingham city centre and has been threatened with legal action from council officials who tried to ban him playing festive tunes.

But Mr Poole defied the council's warnings and has continued to blast out his Christmas jingles. The row started when Mr Poole was approached by two street wardens about the carols but he never thought it would go this far.

So he was stunned to receive a letter from Birmingham City Council's environmental department, entitled Control of Pollution Act 1974. It warned that he was in breach of section 62:1b of the act and accused him of advertising his business through the sound system.

Mr Poole, who raises money for Birmingham Children's Hospital with his festive display on the edge of the city's infamous German Christmas markets, said: "This decision is just complete and utter nonsense. When they gave me the letter and told me to stop playing the carols I was just gobsmacked.

"I'll keep playing my Christmas songs and if they don't like it they can take me to court. It's just some Scrooge council officials being jobsworths."

NEWS IN BRIEF

Work under way on council homes

WORK has started on £3.2million estate of council homes in West Bromwich. Kier Living is behind the development on land off Kent Close.

There will be 29 two, three and four-bed homes. Construction work is expected to be completed by August 2016. It is part of a wider £12.5m scheme to meet the growing demand for properties across the borough.

A total of 145 homes will be built by 2018.Earmarked land includes the former Bolton Court site in Ocker Hill and Tibbington Terrace, Tipton as well as Doulton Road, Rowley Regis.

Flats and shops for fire-hit site

SIX flats and three shops will be built on a fire-ravaged site in Smethwick.

Developer Arun Verma's application for the development at 2 to 4 Cape Hill has been given the green light by Sandwell Council. The flats will all be two bedrooms according to his submissions to the authority.

A report by Thorn Kingson Developments on Mr Verma's behalf stated: "The site is previously developed land on which stood a prominent retail property which was destroyed by fire. The proposed development would make better use of the site."

Toilets to become an advice centre

PLANNERS have backed proposals to turn a toilet in Oldbury into a community advice centre.

The change of use for the amenity in Albert Street has been granted by Sandwell Council.

The toilet block is currently 'vacant/undergoing refurbishment' according to paperwork submitted by developer Amer Khan.

The community hub will be open from 9am-9pm seven days a week, employing two full-time workers.

Charges now apply at Ringway car park

A WEST Bromwich car park has become pay and display. Charges will apply on the Ringway car park from Monday to Saturday 8am to 6pm.

It has been free since the head leaseholder for the Farley Centre went into receivership in April this year.

Sandwell Council announced it was taking over ownership in August, stating they wanted to secure the future of the short stay car park. At present the car park only facilitates homeware retailer B&M.

Mariah set for Brum

MARIAH Carey brings her Sweet Sweet Fantasy tour to the Barclaycard Arena on March 20 as part of her first tour of Europe for 13 years. Tickets go on general sale at 9am tomorrow, Friday, priced from £51.33-£79.45. Book online at www.theticketfactory.com or call 0844 33 88 222.

IN MY VIEW
with Mark Andrews

Priorities all wrong on Gazza allegation

TWENTY-FIVE years ago, when Gazzamania was at its height, it felt like I was the only person in the country who wondered what all the fuss was about.

Yes, there was the occasional flash of brilliance, those electrifying mazy runs that would leave defenders bamboozled, but it always seemed to me he was more famous for crying, belching, and generally making a fool of himself than for anything he achieved on the pitch.

Now, as he approaches his 50th birthday, the former midfielder shows few signs of maturing.

His battles with the bottle and bizarre behaviour have been well documented, and last month he stunned the audience at Wolverhampton Civic Hall with a stupid comment about not being able tell whether a black security guard was smiling or not.

Funny? Not remotely. Offensive? Certainly. The man is clearly an imbecile. And if I were the security guard in question, I would feel entitled to question my employers about whether this idiot should be allowed to perform at the Civic again.

What I do not understand, though, is how an unfunny and offensive joke has become a police matter.

West Midlands Police says it has received a report of a "hate crime", has taken a statement from the victim and an inquiry is ongoing.

Surprised

But crude and objectionable though the comment was, I doubt very much whether there was any hatred in Gazza's words, let alone a crime.

I would also be very surprised if the complainant was the security guard himself, who I suspect is made of sterner stuff.

More likely, I imagine, it will have come from one of those thin-skinned activists who is always first to take offence on somebody else's behalf, and spends most of their spare time urging people to sign petitions on Facebook.

Maybe it is unfair to blame the police for investigating the alleged "hate crime". If they ignored it, the Guardian readers would have had a field day. And of course, there may be more to the story than meets the eye.

On the other hand HM Inspectorate of Constabulary has just panned West Midlands Police, saying the force is failing to protect children from abuse and failing to carry out basic checks on sex offenders.

You may also recall that earlier this year, head of the National Police Chief's Council Sara Thornton said that burglary victims may not always be visited at home as police prioritise other crimes, saying that officers need to shift their focus away from "traditional" offences.

Well call me a "traditionalist" if you like, but I think somebody might have their priorities wrong here.

Joel Richards, who was also named as Referee of the Year

Councillor Darren Cooper attends the official opening

Owen and Suzy Richards on the badminton court in the hall

Sports hall honour for family hit by tragedy

Emotions ran high as a sports hall was officially opened in memory of Joel Richards. **DAVID COSGROVE** reports

"I WISH Joel had been a Premier League referee and he was here unveiling his own plaque for his own merits – not having to do it like this."

The heartbreaking words of the mother of Tunisia terror victim Joel Richards as a sports hall in his home town was named after him.

The Joel Richards Sports Hall was unveiled by his younger brother Owen at the official opening of Wednesbury Leisure Centre last Wednesday.

Joel, aged 19, was murdered in the terror attack in Sousse in June, alongside his uncle Adrian Evans and grandfather Patrick Evans – while Owen survived.

The boys' mother Suzy said the loss of three members of a close-knit family group had left 'a big void', but 16-year-old Owen has been a rock.

Suzy, 46, said: "I'm unbelievably proud but also very emotional.

Shining

"There were lots of tears because it's so sad that this had to happen.

"It was heartbreaking for me, my mum and Owen and there's a big void in our lives now.

"We went from a family of six to a family of three within 24 hours."

She added: "For Owen especially it's so difficult to have to deal with such a big loss at such a young age.

"He is a product of my dad [Patrick], my brother [Adrian] and Joel as they invested so much time in him and that's shining through now.

"Owen has saved us.

"The three of us all work together.

"He's grown up a lot and now he knows what's important in life.

Owen Richards and The Mayor of Sandwell Barbra Price officially open the sports hall

"What happened puts things into perspective."

Owen unveiled the plaque at a ceremony yesterday then headed into the sparkling new sports hall to have a quick session trying out the badminton and table tennis facilities with his school friends.

The teenager has shown courage and inner strength beyond his years to deal with the aftermath of the tragedy.

Suzy said he takes after his older brother – who was on course to become a Premier League referee – and is now looking to follow the same career.

Although he only lived to 19, his mother said Joel 'achieved more than some people do in their whole lives'.

Saddlers fan Joel, a former pupil at the town's Stuart Bathurst and Wood Green schools, was a keen sportsman and promising football referee. "He brought the best out of everybody," Suzy said.

"Joel was just so kind and had a great character.

"Owen is immensely proud of his brother and is now hoping to take refereeing up himself."

Six months on from the tragedy, the emotional scars still run deep for Suzy, her mother Maureen and Owen.

Emotional

But sticking together has helped them come through.

Owen, who turned 16 just a month before the attack, has started sixth form at Stuart Bathurst RC High School and College in Wednesbury.

He is studying PE, maths and biology at A-level. "We're still feeling it really hard," Suzy said. "The tributes are lovely but it's very emotional and there's a big void.

Owen, left, with his uncle, grandfather and Joel

"We are all staying strong for Owen.

"My motto is 'if Owen can do it, then we can'.

"Getting through each day isn't easy."

Emotional Sandwell Council leader Darren Cooper said: "None of us need to be reminded of the dreadful events that took place earlier this year in Tunisia.

"As a council we took the decision to name the sports hall after Joel Richards.

"No-one can underestimate the feeling across Sandwell about the tragic news about these people who were so brutally murdered on holiday in Tunisia.

"We wanted to name this new sports hall after Joel because we knew he was a keen sports enthusiast, so as a council we talked to the family and decided we would do it."

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Remembering Charlie's cartoon legacy

I WAS honoured recently to talk to Steve Grigg on the show I host for Black Country Radio. I knew Steve from school and probably was unaware at the time the immense contribution his father Chaz (Charlie) made to our lives.

Through the course of the brief hour we had chatting on the Omma n Chain Steve outlined how his father followed a dream from working in Oldbury to drawing such characters as Korky the Cat and Desperate Dan, iconic figures in the comics most kids would fetch from the paper shop on a Saturday.

There were numerous others and saucy postcards you would get by him, from any trip to the seaside. As the conversation progressed it became obvious just how important this man was to the social culture of a generation and how in some way locally this should be recognised. Steve has so much material that his dad created it shouts out to be part of an exhibition, a publication of some kind. Even more than these ideas, which in effect I would love to be involved in is a more permanent marker of the man's work in either Oldbury or Langley.

I attended the unveiling of the Jack Judge plaque in Oldbury and to me Charlie Grigg stands on the same level.I'm not sure how far raising awareness of this man's work can go. I am now looking at some of the material myself and the story is one of determination and endeavour to enter a world far removed from his work in Oldbury. I hope people read this and pick up the initiative to use social media to raise awareness of this man's contribution to our lives.

DR BRIAN DAKIN
(AKA Billy Spake Mon), Tividale

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

POST
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Letters should be brief and MUST include name, address and telephone number number. The Editor reserves the right to condense letters.

Internet is new tool of terrorists

REFERRING to the letter from B Khan, Chronicle letters, December 3, I would ask the question, has he/she never heard of the internet?

With that in mind, terrorists don't have to live in France or the UK to get detailed instructions about attacks to be made in those places.

No-one is 'blaming' the refugees – but what better way to get into a country than to become faceless and nameless, and mingle with these unfortunate souls fleeing repression. Can we afford to ignore the fact that this could have happened?

I have just listened to a great speech by Nigel Farage given to the EU, unfortunately, it wasn't broadcast over here, it came to me via the internet. It was about the futility of bombing Syria, and also about the relationship between Turkey and Syria. Quite a revelation! No wonder it wasn't aired over here!

E A PITT
Oldbury

Benn-chmark for speech excellence

IT would be a cold heart not to find the excellent speech given by Hilary Benn (labour MP) during the Syrian air strikes debate one of passion and emotion, as well as intelligence and balanced opinions.

His oration was diligent and I found myself rather than listening to a shadow front bencher, actually believing here was a real alternative as a labour party leader to the abysmal Corbyn.

It was clearly a speech to position himself frontally, the first sign of the swooping predators around the IRA sympathiser that leads his party now. Benn showed a rare grit amongst politicians these days, soured only by the awful comments made thereafter by Alex Salmond who said Benn's father would be spinning in his grave if he could of heard his son speak.

I note the bookies have already slashed Benn's odds to favourite ahead of our own Tom Watson, and as I predicted Corbyn may well go down as the shortest serving Labour leader ever. Whatever your view on Syrian air strikes, this was a speech that will be remembered for quite a while.

S HARRISON
West Bromwich

Evictions every 90 seconds

LANDLORDS in England evicted a tenant every 90 seconds over the last year, a homelessness charity has claimed.

Shelter revealed that more than 352,000 people were threatened with being turned out onto the streets as 149,542 main tenants were issued with court orders between October 2014 and September 2015.

The charity reveals that fast-rising rents, housing benefit cuts and a woeful lack of truly affordable homes are ramping up the pressure on cash strapped households.

I wouldn't mind betting that by the year 2020, Britain will be rated as worse than a third world country if the current trend continues – and governments are allowed to govern based on a 23 percent vote.

Even though I believe that voting should be compulsory – it will never happen.

P AGG
Wednesbury

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Sandwell Mayor Barbara Price with head Haydn Moss and pupils

Wednesbury Coat of Arms by Harvills Hawthorn Primary School at the gallery

A view of The Ruskin Pottery Collection as imagined by Priory Primary School

The Zeppelin Raid, by Holyhead Primary School, which is also on display

Views of Brunswick Park, put together by St John's CofE Primary School youngsters

Unique views in frame

BUDDING artists have teamed up to recreate historic icons and events of the Black Country in a new exhibition.

Pupils from eight primary schools across Wednesbury unveiled their work at the town's museum and art gallery, in a new show running until Christmas.

The artwork details events such as the Zeppelin bombing of Wednesbury in the First World War, and of the ancient Anglo Saxon King Alfred, who had a stronghold in the area more than 1,000 years ago.

The exhibition was set up by Haydn Moss, headteacher of Moorland Primary in Wednesbury, who was approached by Sandwell Museums to organise a show.

Mr Moss commended the efforts and quality of work of all the pupils and schools. He said: "It was an outstanding effort from the schools that took part. The work produced was of a real high quality. This is the first time we have done a gallery takeover. The museum asked Wednesbury primary schools to take over an exhibition space in the museum, and they asked us to come up with a project. We have a lot of celebratory projects in Wednesbury each year, and now this is one of them." The theme of local history was decided at a meeting held between the teachers of the different schools – set up by Mr Moss.

Each school was then allocated a specific historical aspect of the area to create artwork for.

In total, 150 pupils took part in the joint project, who ranged from ages seven to 11.

The artwork varied from paintings and drawings to clay sculptures. Other drawings done included those of historical artefacts in the museums collection such as coats of arms and old Ruskin pottery, Oak House in West Bromwich which dates back to the 1600s and St Bartholomew's Church and St Mary's Church in Wednesbury.

Jail for carjacker after bishop injured

Raid victim Mormon bishop David Charmbury

A CAR-JACKER who left a Mormon bishop with serious injuries after dragging him underneath his own vehicle has been jailed for almost seven years.

Harley Davidson Heyes stole the Mazda CX5 sports car as David Charmbury opened the church gates in Chelmsley Wood, Solihull, at around 9am on August 16 this year.

Mr Charmbury was knocked to the ground and dragged by the car along the road leaving him with a head injury, fractured pelvis which required surgery, a fractured kneecap, punctured lung and several broken ribs. It led to him being placed into an induced coma, followed by four weeks of hospital treatment and he continues to recover at home. The Mazda was taken from outside the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Clopton Crescent and dumped more than a mile away.

Heyes rifled through the vehicle and took an iPad, iPhone and iPod. He then ordered a taxi to pick him up in Eagle Grove and take him to his home in Bluebell Drive, Chelmsley Wood, where he was arrested by police. Heyes, aged 36, pleaded guilty to robbery and was sentenced at Birmingham Crown Court to a jail term of six years and 10 months.

Protest on illegal parking at school

MORE than 180 parents and staff have signed a petition calling for action to tackle illegal parking at a Wednesbury school.

Old Park Primary School headteacher Teresa Boddington branded the situation an 'accident waiting to happen'. The petition calls for a lollipop lady to be instated at the school alongside a zebra crossing.

By Clare Butler

Complaints of vehicles speeding, parking on zigzag lines and across driveways when picking up and dropping off children at the school have been on-going in recent months.

Parent, Hardeep Bhillon, whose four-year-old son is currently in reception class, said that she decided to start the petition after she feared a major accident would happen. She explained: "It is frightening to think that the children may be at risk when going in and out of school – all just due to people parking inconsiderately on the road. I was even crossing myself when a car came speeding out of nowhere.

"It has been an on-going problem for quite a while, but this is the first time I have decided to start a petition as I feel now something seriously needs to be done by the council."

Headteacher Mrs Boddington added: "We are working closely with local PSCO's and have even set up our own junior PCSO system where children alert drivers to inconsiderate parking too. We are working together to appeal to the council to hopefully introduce some calming and road safety measures, as it is an accident waiting to happen."

Councillors have also supported concerns by requesting Sandwell Council 'camera cars' to attend Old Park Road and surrounding streets. Councillor Elaine Costigan, who represents the Wednesbury ward, said that inconsiderate drivers had no thought for children's safety.

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- Open Monday to Saturday (including Christmas Eve) and Sunday 20th December
Re-opens 28th December 2015

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Town Centre Car Park
Wednesdays and Saturdays

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Fridays/Saturdays (General Goods),
extra day Christmas Eve
EXTRA OPENING DAY
SUNDAY
20TH DECEMBER

Oldbury Market,
Adjacent Sainsbury's
Mondays, Tuesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays
Up to Christmas (including Christmas Eve)
Closed 28th December 2015

All Markets are closed on 25th, 26th and 27th December and 1st January 2016.
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Fines on way over smoking

A PILOT scheme that would see smokers fined for puffing on cigarettes in Sandwell's hospitals will get under way in February, it has been revealed.

The crackdown on smoking will be rolled out across Sandwell and West Birmingham NHS Trust's sites for good from April if the trial is successful.

By David Cosgrove

Smokers will initially be confined to 'shelters' – before a blanket ban on taking a drag is introduced in 2018.

There will be messages in the shelters giving smokers advice on how to quit and the procedures the NHS has that can help stop.

Hospital bosses rubber-stamped the plan at a meeting of the trust board yesterday. Councillor Bob Lloyd, who sits on Sandwell Council's health scrutiny board, welcomed the move.

He said: "We all know the harm that cigarettes do, particularly to people that are already in hospital.

"It's about supporting people and the Trust need to make sure there's a mechanism to encourage people to stop – you've got to have a carrot and a stick approach.

"If they take that step to give people a nudge then that might be all it takes to get them to stop."

The smoking shelters will be the only place people can smoke from February. If people are caught smoking anywhere else they would be slapped with a fixed penalty notice – although the level of fine has yet to be confirmed.

The policy will be brought in at Sandwell General, City and Rowley Regis Hospitals initially. A zero tolerance ban will be introduced at all sites when the new Midland Metropolitan Hospital opens in 2018.

Councillor Lloyd said: "Maybe going into hospital will give people who smoke the realisation of the impacts of doing it. It might be a good time to go to people and ask 'why not change your life and stop smoking?'

Library hours increase

THE Library of Birmingham will extend its opening hours and introduce 'self-service' equipment from February 1. The site originally had its opening hours slashed but bosses announced in July that it would be open 12 hours a day as part of a shake-up which will see the Brasshouse Language Centre move to the £188 million building. Self-service points will be available from 9am to 9pm, Monday to Friday. The library will shut for three days over Christmas.

Shop takes off to help air ambulance

Dave Heeley, multi-Paralympic gold medallist Lee Pearson and Sandwell Mayor Barbara Price among those at the launch

BLACK Country charity champion 'Blind' Dave Heeley and multi-Paralympic gold medallist Lee Pearson were on hand to open a new shop supporting the air ambulance.

The Midlands Air Ambulance shop has opened in West Bromwich to help raise money for the service which does not receive Government funding.

Mr Heeley, who was the first blind man to run seven marathons, in seven continents, in seven days, was joined by 10-time gold medallist and equestrian star Mr Pearson, who is the Midland Air Ambulance ambassador, and Sandwell's mayor Barbara Price.

The shop in High Street is the charity's first in the Black Country and stocks clothing, accessories, furniture, books, CDs and DVDs, electrical goods and homewares.

The charity said only donations from members of the public will ensure the shop is able to survive. Mr Heeley said: "I was delighted to be asked to help launch the shop. The people of West Bromwich are known for their generosity and charitable spirit and I would ask them to come down and support the shop over the Christmas period."

Passenger numbers soar in record November

BIRMINGHAM Airport is on course for a record-breaking year after nearly 700,000 passengers passed through its terminal last month.

The West Midlands gateway is expected to reach a total of 10 million passengers for this year, making it the busiest in the airport's 77-year history. And bosses are already predicting another record-breaker in 2016, with a string of new airlines lined up to carry even more passengers in and out of Birmingham.

November's record-breaking passenger figure of 693,033 was 7.1 per cent up on the same month a year ago, with long-haul flights proving particularly popular with passenger numbers up 21.4 per cent. It means the airport has broken passenger records in 10 out of the 11 months so far this year.

Paul Kehoe, chief executive of Birmingham Airport, said: "November's figures are extremely encouraging."

Tracking back 60 years with Metro in the city

FOR the first time in over 60 years trams will be operating in Birmingham city centre as part of the multi-million pound line extension.

The first step in the £128m extension programme, which started in 2012, will see Midland Metro run on a second line through city centre between Bull Street to New Street station.

Passenger services were operational from Sunday December 6, but the entire 0.7 mile extension will not open in one go in order to minimise disruption to the Christmas trading period.

The entire project was due to be completed during 2015, but issues surrounding the construction of John Lewis and the Grand Central shopping centre have delayed completion.

The route, along Bull Street, Corporation Street and Stephenson Street, will see trams in the city centre for the first time since 1953.

The Metro makes its way through to Bull Street in Birmingham city centre

Regional

The extension is being part-funded by £75.4m from the Department for Transport, which gave its backing in February 2012.

The Snow Hill to New Street extension includes a £40 million fleet of new trams and is expected to create more than 1,300 new jobs, adding £50 million a year to the regional economy.

Work has also begun on extending the route from New Street station to Centenary Square with services expected to start running in 2019.

Mark Langford, press officer for Centro, said: "This is great news not just for Birmingham but for the wider region.

"The Midland Metro primarily runs through the Black Country region but with this first phase of Birmingham city centre now completed, we can look forward to the future work and tramlines that will be created, including new Brierley Hill and Wednesbury lines. It's a huge boost for the region, with the amount of revenue coming back into the economy each year and the huge number of jobs that are being created in this phase alone."

Centro's chief executive Geoff Inskip has praised the work and effort that has gone into the completion of the first phase and said due to the time of year and further unforeseen circumstances, delays to the rest of the work could not be helped.

Carjack victim hits out at attacker's sentence

"THE whole episode has destroyed my family and the verdict has left us disappointed."

Those are the words of car-jacking victim Reg Stocking after his brutal attacker Andrew Jones was jailed for 14 years.

Mr Stocking, aged 79, has been left wheelchair-bound following the attack in May this year.

At the hearing on Friday, Judge Stephen Eyre QC described Jones, 34 of Manley Close, West Bromwich, as cowardly and callous' after he was sentenced via video link at Birmingham Crown Court having refused to attend court.

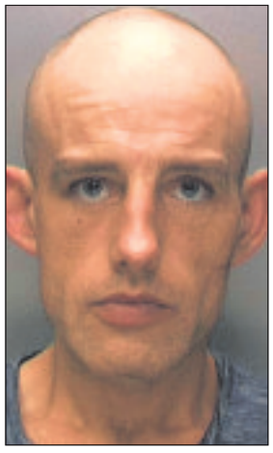
He was told he would spend at least nine years behind bars and will not be considered for release until he was deemed not to pose a threat to the public. When he is released, he will spend a further four years on licence.

Mr Stocking said: "At the last hearing we were told he could be looking at 25 to life, so we did expect him to get more than he has. The whole episode has destroyed my family and the verdict has left us disappointed, but we must be happy that this evil man is now off the streets."

Mr Stocking's son, David, said: "I feel he should have got more, if only he knew how much damage he has caused. Our whole family has been left upset but at least now after the verdict we can all try moving on with our lives, that's what Dad promised us."

Judge Eyre had said a life sentence was a possibility when Jones was found guilty following a trial last month. A victim statement was read to the court in which Mr Stocking explained how his life had been totally changed by the attack, how he is unable to walk unaided and lost his teeth.

Drug addict Jones lay in wait as Mr Stocking moved his car into a gated driveway in Chapel Street on May 10. The attacker jumped into the car as the pensioner opened the gate. Realising what was happening, Mr Stocking, who had previously worked in security, attempted to stop Jones but was hit by the car and dragged along underneath it.



Andrew Jones, who has been jailed for 14 years over the carjacking

Victim Reg Stocking seen in the wheelchair he now has to use

The robber drove off in the car without a thought for his victim who was left lying in the road. The court heard how he had took the car to try and raise money for drugs.

Just eight hours later, Jones used the Peugeot 207 as a getaway car at a burglary on Groveland Road, Dudley Port, where a TV was stolen.

Mr Stocking has previously said his life has been 'left in tatters' from the attack and feels as though he has served his own life sentence.

Birmingham Crown Court heard how Jones had only been released from prison seven months before the attack after stabbing a man 11 times. He also has 24 previous convictions relating to the theft of vehicles.

Jones had denied robbery, causing grievous bodily harm with intent, burglary and witness intimidation – but the jury found him guilty on all four counts. Ian Crooks, senior crown prosecutor from West Midlands Crown Prosecution Service said: "The attack on Mr Stocking can only be described as heinous and cowardly."

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Friday 25 December	Monday 28 December
Monday 28 December	Tuesday 29 December
Tuesday 29 December	Wednesday 30 December
Wednesday 30 December	Thursday 31 December
Thursday 31 December	Saturday 2 January
Friday 1 January	Sunday 3 January

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Opening times can be found at www.sandwell.gov.uk/tip

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Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council

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All collections will return to normal from Monday 4 January 2016

Hall End Methodist Church Sunday School's entry in the West Bromwich Carnival of July 1, 1967. The church, at Hall End, which dates from 1902, closed on June 28, 2009. This photograph is used courtesy of T.J.H. Price

A rare look inside Christian Spiritualist Church, Whitehall Road opposite Farley Street in June 1959. By 1970 the property was demolished. Photo courtesy of Ron Jones

Archibald Kenrick and Sons' employees' children's Christmas party from around 1956. Among those pictured are Royston Hunt, Ken Wooding, John Beighton and Colin Evetts. The photo is thanks to Ken Wooding

Monuments mark 250 years of town's history as an industrial powerhouse

MEMORY LANE

Report by Carl Chinn

WEST Bromwich was as much a product of the Industrial Revolution as was the factory system, steam power, and the sub-division of labour.

According to Frederick Hackwood, it was 'the Chicago of Modern England' because it had developed as rapidly as a recently settled American city, while the American observer Elihu Burritt praised West Bromwich as 'a place of much vigour and growth'.

As a new town it emerged swiftly from heathland soon after the Napoleonic Wars. Focused on its High Street, it quickly eclipsed in size and importance the nearby older hamlets like Hill Top and Overend.

Yet for all its importance, West Bromwich has not figured prominently in the work of academic historians, and a comprehensive history of the town awaits to be written.

By contrast, the people's history of West Bromwich has been ably and well served by Terry Price. Terry is an assiduous researcher into the history of the town and of Great Bridge and is the author of several outstanding books on both places.

Through them he has raised large sums of money for good causes locally.

His new book is called 'West Bromwich Remembered' and in the introduction he writes: "West Bromwich has a number of monuments within its borders celebrating people and events previously associated with the borough over the last 250 years.

"The most impressive of these can be found at Carters Green, where a magnificent clock tower was erected in 1897, by public subscription, to honour the town's first and five-times Mayor, Alderman Reuben Farley JP. Dartmouth Square has an ornamental drinking fountain which was provided by the aforementioned gentleman in 1885 as a memorial to his mother, Elizabeth Farley. The town's first war memorial was unveiled in 1919 outside the Victory Club at 64 Upper High Street, previously a children's private school known as The Elms.

"This First World War cenotaph, which now stands in Heath Lane Cemetery, was financed solely by the local ex-servicemen returning from the 1914-18 conflict.

"In 2006 the humanitarian and acting achievements of West Bromwich-born Hollywood star Madeleine Carroll were officially recognised by the borough council when a 2 metre-high granite public work of art was erected in front of the new Arts Centre in New Street.

"The Pauper Memorial in Heath Lane Cemetery, erected in 2008, commemorates all those buried in public graves who by law could not have a headstone of their own. This memorial provides a focus for relatives who have no identifiable place to pay their respects. Its inscription reads: 'This memorial stands in recognition of the people who passed through the workhouse system and to the memory of all those buried in unmarked pauper graves'.

"The 'Cross in Hand' bronze sculpture in front of Wesley Methodist Church on the High Street is dedicated to John Wesley, Methodist preacher and religious reformer, who on 9 January 1743 formed the first Methodist Society in Staffordshire at Crabb's Mill Farm, Holloway Bank, Hill Top. The sculpture was originally unveiled in Duchess Parade on 23 October 1989. It was transferred to its present location and rededicated on 9 May 2013.

"In West Bromwich Central Library there is a brass plaque dedicated to seismologist John Johnson Shaw CBE (1873-1948), who after constructing his own improved seismograph in 1908, went on to pioneer research in microseismology.

"Although his first experiments were conducted in the cellar of his Hill Top premises, from 1910 he carried out much of his work in the basement of his new home at Sunnyside, 77a Birmingham Road, West Bromwich."

The unveiling of West Bromwich's first war memorial, at the Victory Club (or The Elms), 64 High Street, in 1919. All photos are from 'West Bromwich Remembered'; this one is thanks to Margaret Little

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Scheme returns to help cut down borough energy bills

A POPULAR cash-saving energy scheme to save Sandwell residents hundreds of pounds on their energy bills is back.

Sandwell Council has teamed up with energy auction specialist iChoosr to help residents get a better deal from gas and electricity suppliers through Energy Switch. It works by getting together consumers in the area and using their combined buying power.

Energy suppliers then compete for their custom by offering the best possible energy prices. Three energy auctions have been held so far this year, in February, May and October with details of the most recent in October still being confirmed.

Councillor Paul Moore, Sandwell's cabinet member for regeneration and economic investment, said: "The first two energy auctions of this year held in February and May saw 124 residents switch, saving an average of just over £300 a year each, a total saving of more than £37,000.

"Residents have nothing to lose and only potential cash savings to gain."

Register

And it's not just people in Sandwell who can benefit from better deals. Anyone can use the council's website to sign up to the scheme and see how much they can save. To find out if they can save money, residents need to fill out a simple on-line form. The latest scheme is now open and residents have until Monday February 12 to register.

After the registration period closes, those who have signed up will receive details of their new deal by Friday February 12 – which will tell them how much they can save by switching supplier. They then have until Tuesday March 15 to decide whether to accept the new offer.

Residents can sign sign up at www.sandwell.gov.uk/energyswitch and will need a copy of their latest gas and electricity bills to hand.

Man says all possessions lost in blaze

A ROMANIAN man who woke to find his bedroom alight and smoke bellowing from under his mattress says he lost all his possessions during the fire.

Gabriel Tudorache, 30, managed to escape the thick smoke following a flat fire in Wednesbury. Ten of his flatmates also fled the property in Spring Head, run by J9 Accommodation, on Sunday.

Mr Tudorache said he had shared the room with his brother, who was on holiday in Romania at the time, since March. He said he had been left shaken by the incident. "I was in my room at the time and it was the fire alarm that actually woke me up," he said. "I ran out and went to try and get back in but there was too much smoke. I have lost everything other than a chest of drawers and a bit of carpet."

Mr Tudorache, who works full time at a furniture store in Aldridge, said he could not go to work because his boots had also been destroyed.

Laser and 3D workshops launch at lab

Black Country Consortium CEO Sarah Middleton, Chairman of the LEP Employment and Skills Board Paul Linton, Sandwell College principal Graham Pennington, Black Country Chamber president Ninder Johal, and Council leader Darren Cooper

A WORKSHOP full of the latest equipment to develop new technology has been opened at Sandwell College.

Fab Lab Black Country was unveiled at the Central Sixth campus in New Square, West Bromwich.

Engineering and computing students were among the first to create electronic prototypes and mini traffic light simulators when arts group Creative Black Country teamed up with Black Country Atelier, an education technology company.

The site is equipped with hi-tech equipment including 3D printers, laser cutters. The state-of-the-art facility was officially launched by leading Black Country business figures from the Consortium, Chamber of Commerce and Local Enterprise Partnership – the body made up of business and council leaders with the job of boosting jobs and investment.

Black Country Consortium chief executive Sarah Middleton was joined by chairman of the LEP's employment and skills board Paul Linton, Black Country Chamber of Commerce president Ninder Johal, and Sandwell Council leader Councillor Darren Cooper.

College principal Graham Pennington said: "We can open up school children's minds to science and engineering by capturing their imagination, and we have a fantastic resource for our own students with real projects that they can help local businesses work on."

Centre sets up to help businesses

SANDWELL Council and the University of Wolverhampton have teamed up to set up a new business advice centre.

The Sandwell Business Solutions Centre has opened at the CAP Centre in Windmill Lane, Smethwick. It includes a state-of-the-art training suite for specialist Building Information Modelling (BIM) courses – the first facility of its kind in the country.

BIM is set to transform the way the construction supply chain works, with clients and suppliers sharing digital-engineered designs and building efficiency data. Tom Watson MP, Sandwell Council leader Darren Cooper and cabinet member for regeneration and economic investment Paul Moore officially opened the centre during a visit on Friday.

Councillor Cooper said: "This is a very important project as the council is always striving to help local businesses to thrive and to support them to use the skills of local workers.

"The Sandwell area and the wider Black Country is famous for its manufacturing works and there have been many examples of start-up firms growing into larger companies to provide high quality goods and of course much-needed job opportunities.

"We are particularly anxious to help the smaller businesses in the borough to thrive."

Children's services gets new chief

SANDWELL Council's children's services has a new boss, after a commissioner was appointed by Government. The service was ranked inadequate by Ofsted inspectors in June, the same result it received after a visit in 2013.

Eleanor Brazil, who was previously employed in the same role at Slough Council, has been appointed commissioner of the service. Her remit is to ensure the department makes strides to improve in the next six months.

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Staff spread the Christmas message

Sue Stevens and Adele Hurley who have been out and about surprising people with their random acts of kindness

THEY say a small act of kindness can have endless ripples.

And for staff at a Black Country firm, they are trying to spread those far and wide this Christmas.

Workers of BCTG, a training company in Oldbury, have been challenged by their boss to give away thousands of pounds to the public.

Five teams have each been handed £600 to give out, which has come from money set aside by the company.

They have already hit the streets to pay for people's shopping, car parking and even pensioners haircuts.

And charities and families in need have received much-needed cash gifts. Scores of people have so far been helped and among them is a West Bromwich couple whose young son has cancer.

They have received a cash donation which will help them afford to redecorate their son's bedroom for Christmas. Unwanted handbags full of toiletries and essentials have also already been filled, for homeless women in the Black Country and Birmingham. And another team has handed in cash-filled envelopes to Russell's Hall Hospital for cancer patients undergoing chemotherapy.

The teams are also handing out cards for every random act of kindness, which read 'it's nice to be nice, please accept the gift, it is an act of kindness, there's no catch, it's a gesture from us to you.'

Chris Luty, director at BCTG who has set the challenge for his staff, said: "We know Christmas time is not always the happiest for lots of people for lots of reasons. So, rather than make a large Christmas donation to one charity, which the company has always done in the past, we decided to organise a whole series of small and random acts of kindness."

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Courses start: Monday 11th January, 11am.
Come into the college Reception and we'll get you started!
Remember, there's a £50 per week bursary for attending the course.
Sandwell College
West Bromwich
0800 622 006 www.sandwell.ac.uk
RATED GOOD BY Ofsted

Style tips for Christmas

Advice to help you dream of a white Christmas

NEVER mind decking the halls – it's all about the Christmas tree, isn't it?

Whether you favour a 'can-you-believe-it's-not-real?' artificial one or always opt for the genuine article, whose fragrant scent (and needles) will fill the house, it's the decorations that say most about your taste and family history - from hand-me-down baubles to childhood creations.

"This year, people seem determined to want their tree to be the biggest they can fit in and afford, and they also have a very good idea of what colour or style theme they want to follow," says Craig Roman, home and garden styling expert at Dobbies Garden Centres. "They're very specific about the look they want to achieve, and we have three key looks this year – full-on traditional, with lots of red and gold; a countryside feel, featuring creatures great and small; or the dazzling snowy white tree, embellished with silver or gold touches."

The picture above aims to capture the atmosphere of a winter wood where snow-laden trees sparkle and shimmer in the light.

There are three more pages inside.

Whichever look you choose, make it tree-mendous...

Wooden Houses Advent Calendar, £40. From John Lewis.

Christmas tree decorations and lights from John Lewis.

Swarovski Christmas Baubles, box of four, £45. From John Lewis.

Key looks for winter

Linea 6.5ft fir tree, £70; champagne tree topper, £10 and the bark tealight holder, £6, all available from House of Fraser.

Set of six glass animal heads, £12. Paperchase.

Matrioskas porcelain ornaments, £140. From Lladro.

Father Christmas tin decorations, £3.99. The Oak Room.

Fox head decoration £4.50. John Lewis.

Traditional Christmas decorations, from £1.79, and Washington tree, 7.5ft, £379.99, available from Wyevale

BIG, small, real or fake, it would be tree-son not to create a festive focal point worthy of a gold star. Here we share three key looks for this winter. . .

By Gabrielle Fagan

TRULY TRADITIONAL

Red and green is the ultimate festive look, and has a timeless appeal which can be interpreted in a retro way, or given a dash of kitsch.

"This an absolute classic look with red particularly strong this year and not only in decorations - there are also red berry lights," says Roman. "There's a lovely nostalgic feel to this style of decoration, which is seen in red candy cane and Santa stocking decorations.

"This season, we're seeing much more emphasis on the texture and finishes of baubles – incorporating matt with shiny; shiny with glitter; or those which are ribbed.

"Many have an 'added extra', such as a tiny charm attached to the top, or a ribbon with beading.

"People could embellish their own baubles, by simply sourcing charms, stickers or diamante glitter from craft stores, or use a glitter pen to personalise them with names or messages. Add to the red effect by pegging cards to red ribbon, which can be hung from banisters, curtain or picture rails. You can even add red bows to a wreath too."

DECOR TIP: For a luxury look, dress your tree from the back to the front, hanging up to four baubles all along each branch, depending on their length. Place darker coloured baubles at the back (nearer to the trunk) and brighter shades nearer to the branch tip, to give the illusion of depth. Add to the richness with a string of Red Berry Lights, £24.99, and a battery operated Tree Topper, £9.99, Dobbies Garden Centres, which also have a selection of artificial and real trees.

TREE-MENDOUS TREATS: A luxuriant green 7.5ft artificial Washington tree, £379.99; decorations from £1.79 each, and a Luxury Berry & Pine Garland, £29.99, from Wyevale Garden Centres.

Debenhams has plenty of red decorations to choose from, including a Pack Of Four Red Spotty Christmas Baubles, £12, or Set Of 16 Red Assorted Christmas Baubles, £6.

Embrace a yesteryear look with Father Christmas Tin Decorations, £3.99 each, The Oak Room. Similarly, John Lewis has a Glass Telephone Box Decoration, £5, and a Bombki Large Post Box or London Bus Glass Hanging Decorations, £30 each.

A Red & White Wooden Houses Advent Calendar, reduced to £20 from £40, also from John Lewis, would be a perfect finishing touch.

WOODLAND WAY

Make a tree come alive with woodland creatures, for a look which will delight young and old alike.

"This is a cosy, comforting look featuring all the British wildlife characters.

"Owls are currently the most popular, along with squirrels, foxes, hedgehogs and stags," says Roman.

"Woodland motifs have featured strongly in decor for a while now, and the reddish brown shades of the squirrels and foxes key into the trend for copper tones in decor, so it's not surprising that they're popular for the tree.

"Of course, tiny creatures will look perfectly at home on the branches and evoke a cosy, rustic feel. Stand a tree in an old barrel or a wicker tree hamper to complement that look."

DECOR TIP: Bring in nature by making your own simple hanging decorations. Decorate a tree branch by spray-painting and decorating with tinsel and baubles, to hang on a wall or display on a mantel. Spray pine cones or leaves with copper paint. Champagne Pine Cones Decorations, £6.99 for a set, Dobbies. Pack presents into a Hessian Christmas Santa Sack And Name Tag, £6.99, Not On The High Street.

TREE-MENDOUS TREATS: A Linea 6ft Emerald Tree, currently reduced to £100 from £200, has an appropriately bushy-branched natural look. Alternatively, their Les Deux Alpes 6.5ft Tree, £200, currently available in stores, is a stunner. A collection of Linea Large Glitter Acorn Decorations, reduced from £8 to £4 each, would enhance the woodland effect.

Make a tree come alive with an animal menagerie. Paperchase has Six Glass Animal Heads, including a rabbit, reindeer and fox, £12 for the set, and its Hendrick's Stag Decoration is £6.

John Lewis has a Fox Head Decoration, £4.50 (due back in stock mid-December); while George Home has a sweet Bottle Brush Squirrel Hanging Decoration, £3. If you want to be playful with the theme, one of John Lewis' bestselling decorations is its Glass Christmas Dog Bauble, £6, and their Snowdrift Penguin Soft Hanger, £4, is cute.

WHITE MAGIC

This look captures the atmosphere of a winter wood.

"This is a magical, winter wonderland effect, which – because of its neutral colour palette – works with any decor and is hugely popular," says Roman.

"Lightly flocked artificial trees with twinkling pre-lit white lights are perfect for this, and then all you need is a collection white or silver baubles - the 'less is more' rule definitely applies to this style. If pure white is too cool for your taste, warm up the effect with a few gold baubles.

"This metallic finish is enjoying a revival and will feature very strongly in collections next Christmas too. For a finishing touch, make snowballs by simply rolling white or silver strands of tinsel into a ball, and pop them in between branches."

DECOR TIP: If you're adding strings of lights to a tree and want to check to see if they're evenly placed, turn them on and look at them from the other side of the room by squinting through half-closed eyes.

Neon signs are bang-on-trend this season and John Lewis' White Noel Battery Operated Sign, £20, would look brilliant near a tree or on a mantel. Alternatively, The Handpicked Collection has illuminated letters spelling out 'JOY'; Joy Light, £49.95.

TREE-MENDOUS TREATS: A 2.2m Cranmere Pre-lit Christmas Tree, with 400 LED lights, from £299.99, Dobbies.

House of Fraser's Linea 6ft Pre Lit Flocked Whistler Tree is just as handsome and is currently reduced from £230 to £115. For a stylish contemporary effect, John Lewis has a 4ft Pre-lit Birch Cluster, a chic arrangement of trees on a stand, £100 (re-stocked mid-December).

Glamour and sparkle combine in Swarovski Christmas Baubles, £45 for set of four, and for a Narnia effect, a Snowdrift Acrylic Glitter Stag, £4, both John Lewis.

The Matrioskas Ornaments, a set of three striking white and gold porcelain dolls, £140, Lladro, are an unusual collector's set.

Five ways you can cut down your water usage

IF your home has a water meter, you're probably used to conserving water, but are you doing as much as you could?

1. About a third of the water we use at home is for flushing the loo, but you can save a lot by only flushing when there's something solid to flush away. If this doesn't appeal, you can restrict the amount of water used for each flush by fitting a water-saving loo, such as a dual-flush one that has a big and a little flush. You can also put something (a brick, or a plastic bag designed for the job – some water companies provide these free) in the cistern, so it doesn't use as much water to flush.

2. Taking a shower uses around two-thirds less water than taking a bath, but this is providing you're only in the shower for a few minutes and it's not a power shower – power showers can use more water than a bath. You'll save most water by fitting a flow-restricting shower or an aerating shower head. These use less water per minute and shouldn't leave you showering in a dribble. Mira Showers' Eco showers, for example, use flow regulators to limit the maximum flow of water, while their Eco shower heads use aerating technology to create the sensation of a normal flow using a lot less water (see www.mirashowers.co.uk).

3. If you have a dripping tap, fix it quickly because it will soon waste litres of water. Often the tap just needs a new washer, which isn't hard to fit. You can also save water by fitting flow restrictors or regulators to your home's taps, or tap inserts that aerate the water.

4. One of the best ways to save water is to install a grey-water recycling system. This typically takes waste water from the bath, shower and basin (and sometimes other waste water) and uses it for the loo and outside tap. There are various ways to do this, some of which are expensive, but it can be as straightforward as fitting a waste-pipe splitter to separate the water from your bathroom's loo from the rooms' other waste water.

5. In the garden, rainwater can be collected in a water butt by connecting it to a downpipe, which is a fairly simple DIY job. This makes watering the garden easier. A more elaborate version of this is a rainwater harvesting system. There are different versions, but it's often a system that collects rain from the guttering and pumps it to where it's needed. More than half of the mains water we use at home could be replaced by rainwater in this way, so it could make a big difference.

PRODUCT OF THE WEEK

If you know someone who has a lot of painting to do, a bells-and-whistles roller set would make a cracking Christmas gift. Screwfix has a couple of great-value Harris ones that are currently on offer. Harris' The Really Big Roller Box (currently £23.99, Screwfix, www.screwfix.com) contains all sorts of decorating goodies, including different roller frames and sleeves (the 7in ones are excellent for medium-sized jobs), roller trays, an extension pole for painting ceilings, a useful tray lid and a disposable tray liner.

This set is a fantastic starter kit, as is the Harris Decorators Kit 14 Piece Set (£14.99, Screwfix). This also contains various roller frames and sleeves that produce a good finish, but the best thing about it is the large paint scuttle. Unlike many scuttles, this one has a lid, so you can safety leave paint in it overnight and continue painting the next day, which is really useful. The scuttle's also big enough to be used to mix and store paint in if you're creating your own wall or ceiling colour – simple but brilliant.

HOW-TO TIP

If you discover a frozen pipe at home this winter, act quickly before it bursts. To defrost it, first check that it hasn't split and that the fittings haven't been pushed apart, then apply heat gently along the length of the pipe using a hairdryer – if the pipe leads to a tap, make sure it's turned on. Call in a plumber immediately if you're not confident you can deal with this yourself.

Fill your home with the warm scent of Christmas

A FESTIVE fragrance works wonders for conjuring the Christmas spirit.

The power of scent is well-known – it can turn back time, bring back memories and transport us to other worlds in a nanosecond, which probably explains why more and more of us are embracing home fragrances. Especially at Christmas time, when we feel nostalgic as well as merry.

The season has its characteristic scents, from fir trees and woodsmoke to mince pies and mulled wine – and just a hint of those conjured by the magic of a room spray, candle or diffuser, can evoke the warm, welcoming spirit of the festive season.

There are a myriad more increasingly sophisticated scents too, which can appeal individually and say as much about our style and taste as a personal fragrance.

"This winter, fragrance is all about the beauty of the outdoors, and those who want to be reminded of all their best childhood memories of the season need look no further than the enchantingly beautiful scents conjuring crisp frosted pines, fir tree, winter citrus, holly, ivy and soft white musk notes, representing the first snowfall of winter," says Roz Wicks, marketing manager at fragrance house, Symrise.

"For some, nothing makes the season like the smell of spice and there's an increased focus on food inspired scents this year - brambleberries, cranberries, clementines, cloves, gingerbread, roasted chestnuts, cinnamon, ginger, tonka beans and cardamom. These will fill the house with warmth and cheer on a cold, dark winter's eve."

Those seeking glamorous scents for late-night winter soirees could, she suggests, embrace warm oriental notes to conjure a party atmosphere: rich frankincense, sweet myrrh, velvet rose, sandalwood, cedar and golden amber.

Read on to find out how you can get the right scent for every seasonal occasion, whether to soothe stress as you battle with the preparations, conjure festive atmosphere or simply ramp up the party spirit...

The pine and eucalyptus candle from Jo Malone has a fragrance reminiscent of a stroll in winter woodland

TV presenter Amanda Lamb is working with Air Wick Life Scents

A selection of pillar candles from The White Company

WICK WISDOM

Use a candle snuffer when extinguishing candles. This avoids movement in the wick and debris falling into the melted wax which will cause smoke when you relight. Ensure wicks are trimmed to a maximum length of 5mm before lighting and the wax is clear of debris or dust. Keep a candle on a flat surface and not near draughts, which can cause flickering and uneven burn. Make sure you burn a candle long enough so the wax fully pools across the surface, but no longer than four hours at a time.

ADVENT COUNTDOWN

Make each day in the lead up to Christmas special, with a fragrance of its own. Yankee Candle's Advent House In The Snow, £27.99, features a tea light for every day in one of seven seasonal scents, including spiced orange, snowflake cookie and winter glow, as well as a Christmas Eve votive. If you'd like to specifically match your fragrance to your personality, the company's Fragrance Finder app can help you refine your choice (yankeecandle.co.uk).

STRESS SOOTHERS

For all its charm, the pressures of Christmas preparation can leave us feeling frazzled rather than festive – so call for the scent soothers! AromaWorks has four designed to appeal to the senses: Nurture to relax, Serenity to restore, Inspire to bring balance, and Soulful to calm jangled nerves, all available in their Box Of Signature 4 set, £42.

Running a hot bath, dimming the lights and lying back to soak up the scent of an Elemis Spa Light Candle, £25, which aims to bring peace with vanilla, and then re-energise with orange and cinnamon, is a great stress-buster. For an exotic take on tranquillity, Japanese Takahashi Hiroko has an innovative new range of four fragrances, presented in bone china containers with striking monochrome designs. Ichi is redolent of a rain-refreshed landscape with notes of lily of the valley, jasmine and vetiver. Diffusers, £75 each, Unique & Unity.

COSY NIGHTS

Sitting by the fire writing shopping lists – or, more importantly, Santa requests – is essential, and the right scent could help you make light work of the task. "My favourite fragrance for this time of year is a blend of clementines, mulled wine and firewood, in Mulled Wine By The Fire," says TV presenter Amanda Lamb. Air Wick Life Scents Mulled Wine By The Fire reed diffuser, £4, Asda.

Alternatively, step in from the cold and be warmed by The White Company's Winter scent, which blends notes of cinnamon and clove with a dash of fresh orange, for a traditional aroma. Pillar candles from £25.

WOODLAND WALKS

"Just like a favourite perfume, scented candles can transport us back in time and bring back wonderful memories, with many people using a favourite seasonal scent year after year," says Laura Lee, a florist and event specialist who's helped Kenneth Turner – the fragrance-maker beloved by celebrities including the Prince of Wales, Vanessa Redgrave and Sting – to create three new seasonal scents: Masquerade, Winter Berries and Midwinter, from £42 each.

"Midwinter's based on a walk on Boxing Day through trees laden with lime-green mistletoe – so it includes the fragrance of that with pine, rosemary and thyme, and sparkling musks."

For a bright, bracing aroma also reminiscent of a stroll in winter woodland, Jo Malone's Pine & Eucalyptus Home Candle, £42, hits all the right notes.

MAN UP

Home fragrance doesn't have to a girly pleasure nowadays, as there are plenty of scents to appeal to the boys.

The tangy-sweet odour of old books, beeswax polish and wood-panelling is conjured up for a 'library' scent using plum, peach, leather, violet and patchouli in Bibliotheque by Byredo. A limited-edition Room Spray, £60, Liberty. "It's a timeless scent, unique and quite addictive," says Byredo founder, Ben Gorham.

Alternatively, a Havana Candle, from £20, Karma Feeling, combines the macho scent of Cuban tobacco and oak.

PARTY SPARKLE

Partying and socialising with family and friends is all part of the fun of the season. Before you pop a cork, instantly conjure a party atmosphere with a Champagne Rosé Candle, £25, Voluspa, which has notes of brut rosé Champagne, chilled and poured over cassis berries and edible white rose petals.

The aptly-named Cocktail Gardener candle range from Amazon has four fragrances, £30 each, created by mixologist, Lottie Muir.

"These candles are inspired by years of experimenting with the intense aroma and flavour of plants to capture the joy of nature in a glass," she says. Bloody Rosemary has uplifting notes of rosemary, grapefruit and oak, while Woodland Martini is a velvety mix of sage, Douglas fir needles, cedar and musk.

DIVINE DINING

Enhance a gourmet feast with Diptyque's Liquidambar, from £28, which is spiced with nutmeg and cinnamon, then blended with muscovado sugar for a sweet aroma. Meanwhile, by Sainsbury's Redcurrant And Cassis Cloche Candle, £15, is a rich fruity blend of crushed redcurrants, sweetened with pomegranate and plum.

FLOWER POWER

Heady floral fragrance adds a hint of luxury and evokes rooms filled with bouquets. "Perfume is said to complete a woman's outfit, and home fragrance completes a home, because it should be tailored to the style and personality of the owner," says Leo Gibbon, co-founder of new home fragrance company, IIUVO. Its Ajon candle, £50, has a scent inspired by Gibbon's mother's floristry workshop and contains a blend of orange blossom, jasmine, rose and the essence of a classic gardenia (available direct from the company or from Liberty).

For a budget-friendly option, check out the floral Leafy & Lovely Box Candle, currently reduced from £6 to £4, Superdrug.

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Samantha Groves has gone all out on her home in Bilston

A must stop for Santa at Andrew Sutton's home in Fairlawn Close, New Invention

Multi-coloured illuminations for the Taggart family of Bushbury

Frozen theme with Stuart Bibb's arctic Christmas scene

Going to town – the Parker family display on Stretton Road, New Invention

Shining light and joy

THEY are a special kind of breed and the chances are, there is one who lives not too far from you.

That family that goes all out at Christmas determined to have the most elaborate lights display.

The ones that will have a reindeer or a giant Santa in the front garden as their houses dazzle all around with a plethora lights.

There is seemingly one in every community but what is it that drives these people to climb up a ladder to put a 10ft cuddly snowman on their roof in all weathers just to get it all down again a few weeks later when Christmas is over? It has long been suggested that these people go to such extreme lengths just to outdo the neighbours but that is not the case for Andrew Sutton from Fairlawn Close, New Invention. In fact, the opposite is true.

Not content in covering his own house in lights and decorations, he will also help neighbours in getting their homes and gardens looking as festive as possible.

Single mother Sam Grove's home in Bilston has become a sparkling scene featuring mannequins of Mary and Joseph while brightly lit reindeer, Santa and snowmen stand nearby. Sam's children Ashley, 15, and three-year-old Destiny both have major health problems. But she said: "The festive season is all about doing good to other people. The reaction of everybody from the area has been very positive."

Stuart Bibb's Frozen-themed display has returned in Wentworth Road, Bushbury, but he is not only trying to put a smile on people's faces but raise money for a good cause too.

Visitors who come from all over the Black Country to see the magnificent lights display, which features a 25ft castle and the famous Coca Cola truck made from wood, are being asked to make a small donation to the air ambulance.

Stuart Bibb combines the unusual with the traditional Christmas wreath on the door

COURSES FOR ADULTS

OPEN EVENT

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STARTING IN JANUARY

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IELTS – English for Academic Purposes
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IELTS – SELT (Secure English Language Test)
Life Skills B1, Entry Level 3,
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Intermediate Photography
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This ten week course explores the creative side to photography, the use of studio equipment, the different types of photography and basic image manipulation.

Beginners/Intermediate/Advanced Spreadsheets/Databases/Word
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We offer three levels of courses in Access, Excel and Word, aimed at helping you to master many of the basic tasks that you need in business and administration.

Award in Practical Spanish
15 evenings
Do you wish you could speak better Spanish when you are ordering food, hiring a car, asking for directions or talking to shop owners? This course will help you with classes that are both fun and practical.

Bathrooms on a Budget
4 evenings £75
The course will cover renovating tiling and grouting, applying sealing and silicon, painting preparation and painting finishing.

Health and Social Care Apprenticeships
There are hundreds of vacancies in the Care industry across the region – and our apprenticeships are a great way of getting your career in this sector started. Call our apprenticeship team on 0121 667 5000 (term time only) or come to one of the January open events.

Drawing for Beginners - Introduction to Drawing
10 evenings £200
This beginner's course will include basic art skills such as observational drawing, perspective, scale and proportion and colour theory. You will draw from still life and build up a small art portfolio.

Don't miss the start of your course. Enquire at the college Reception desk from 5 January onwards, come into one of our January Open Events or apply on line.

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Fun is all around in Marti's magic role

BIRMINGHAM Hippodrome's spectacular pantomime Aladdin is a star-studded extravaganza that bills itself as not only the Midlands' best panto but Britain's biggest!

This year's glittering line-up stars Wet Wet Wet singer Marti Pellow as Abanazar, Julian Clary as the Slave of the Ring, and West End star Lee Mead as Aladdin. Returning by popular demand is funnyman Matt Slack, this time as Wishee Washee, and Andrew Ryan plays the Dame for the 25th time as Widow Twankey.

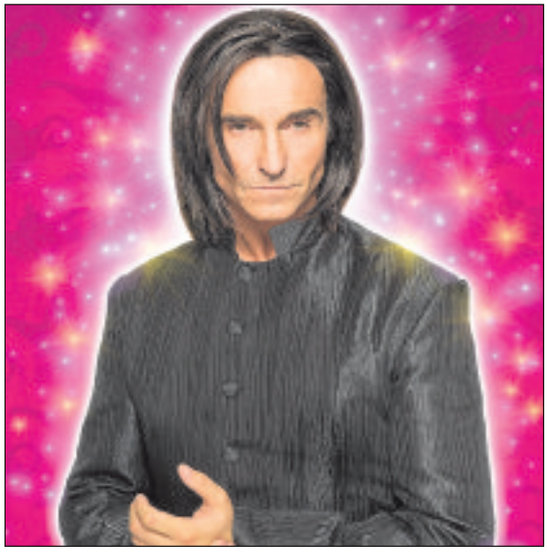
The show is packed with sensational special effects including a magical 3D flying carpet ride, laugh-out-loud comedy, and an Aladdin's cave of lavish sets and costumes.

Julian Clary is an old hand at the panto format. He was at Wolverhampton's Grand Theatre last year and will raise laughs with his double entendres.

For Pellow it will be a new experience, but he said he didn't think twice when asked to star, saying: "I have this thing at the end of each year when a lot of my friends in the theatre tell me they're off to do a panto.

"I've never done one before, it had never been on my list. I remember panto as a kid and I loved it; that was in the days of Stanley Baxter.

"Then I was approached by Michael Harrison, the MD of Qdos. We'd worked together on The Witches of Eastwick. He said I'd be perfect for the part of Abanazar. The pantos that Michael put on are all 'wow'. So, to be part of it is a no-brainer.



Pellow talk — 1980s pop star turns panto villain in Brum's big panto show

"I've not been to a panto since my youth. But those memories from my youth were phenomenal. I would be right up at the back at the King's Theatre (Glasgow) and they were magic. It was total escapism. That's the beauty of theatre, that's the beauty of the story of Aladdin."

Aladdin opens on Saturday and continues until January 31. See www.birminghamhippodrome.com or call 0844 338 5000.

Carols and the classics

NO venues throw themselves more wholeheartedly into the Christmas spirit than Birmingham Town Hall and Symphony Hall. Guest hosts including Alan Titchmarsh and Aled Jones (pictured left) will lead the festivities as the city concert venues host a feast of carols and seasonal classical music.

The City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra's Festive Favourites concerts are as much a part of Brum's celebrations as the German Market and the Hippodrome panto. TV personality Alan Titchmarsh is the guest host for three evening concerts on Friday, Sunday and Monday, plus a 3pm matinee on Sunday. Conducted by Simon Halsey and joined by CBSO associates, this will be a joyous start to the season.

On Saturday at Symphony Hall it's Christmas with Aled Jones as the Welsh singer and presenter leads carols, backed by the City of Birmingham Choir and London Concert Orchestra, and special guests. Ghost stories are traditional at this time of year and on Sunday Clive Andrews recreates the night at the Town Hall in December 1853 when Charles Dickens himself read A Christmas Carol to a spellbound audience.

Jonathan Cohan leads a Christmas Carol Singalong at Symphony Hall on Monday at 2.30pm, joined by special guest West End star Louise Dearman. It's Carols by Candlelight when the Mozart Festival Chorus and Orchestra, in period costume, perform on Tuesday evening. White Christmas on Wednesday is a feast of festive music featuring singers Jacinta Whyte and Tim Howard with Capital Voices and London Concert Orchestra at Symphony Hall. The orchestra returns at 2.30pm the next day for Christmas Eve Classics with Birmingham Choral Union and Four Oaks Cluster Choir.

To book see www.thsh.co.uk or call 0121 345 0600.

West End performer returns with concert

A FORMER amateur performer from Lichfield who has found success on the London stage is returning to the West Midlands for a special show.

Cameron Sharp, who now lives in London, has appeared in the hit musical Rock of Ages in the West End and on tour but tomorrow (Fri) returns home with an evening of swing, soul and musical theatre tunes at the Arena Theatre in Wolverhampton. He will be accompanied by an 18-piece band, The Infinity Jazz Orchestra. Guest singers and friends will also join him for a performance that's also likely to include some festive sparkle.

Tickets are £18, call 01902 321321.

Justin is back for a brand new Purpose

TEEN pop sensation Justin Bieber has announced two concert dates at Birmingham city centre's Barclaycard Arena next autumn.

The Canadian singer will be performing at the venue on October 17 and 18 with tickets starting from £56.95 (plus fee) up to £135.70.

Tickets were going on general sale from 9am today (Thursday, December 17) from www.theticketfactory.com website.

The 21-year-old star has reached the no1 chart spot in more than 100 countries with his new album Purpose, featuring the massive hit song What Do You Mean.

Blast Off with the Neds at Civic gig

ONE of the best party atmospheres is likely to be at Wolverhampton Civic Hall on Saturday when Stourbridge band Ned's Atomic Dustbin have organised the inaugural Kill Your Television Festival, and will play their first new song in 21 years.

The Neds have performed numerous sell-out shows at the venue in recent years. Frontman Jonn Penney said: "Ever since we reformed with all five original members in 2006 we have entertained the idea of writing new songs." The gig will also feature The Wedding Present, The Primitives and Eat, plus a return for legendary indie club night Blast Off.

Sandwell Chronicle Thursday, December 17, 2015

CHOICE

Claudia Winkleman

Strictly Come Dancing Grand Final
(BBC1, 6.35pm)
The four couples gather one last time for the 2015 Grand Final. Tensions are high as the celebrities and their partners face yet more turns on the dance-floor. Tonight, the contestants will be hoping the judges will be kind with more than just their scores, as Len Goodman, Darcey Bussell, Craig Revel Horwood and Bruno Tonioli will also be deciding which of the stars' previous routines will be revisited in the first of tonight's dances. For their second performance, the duos must dazzle both the panel and the audience at home with their "show dance". Once all eight routines are complete, the phone lines will open, giving viewers a chance to decide which of the competitors will be progressing through to the final three.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **10.00** Saturday Kitchen Live. **11.30** James Martin – Home Comforts at Christmas. (R) **12.00** BBC News; Weather. **12.10** Football Focus. **12.55** Sports Personality – The Final 12. (R) **1.55 Film:** The Muppets. (2011) Comedy, starring Jason Segel. **3.30** The Hunt. (R) **4.30** Final Score. **5.25** BBC News. **5.35** Regional Programme. **5.45** Pointless Celebrities.

6.35 Strictly Come Dancing Grand Final. The remaining four couples gather one last time for the 2015 Grand Final. Tensions are high as, after 13 weeks of performances, the celebrities and their professional partners face yet more turns on the dance-floor. Tonight, the contestants will be hoping the judges will be kind with more than just their scores, as Len Goodman, Darcey Bussell, Craig Revel Horwood and Bruno Tonioli will also be deciding which of the stars' previous routines will be revisited in the first of tonight's dances. For their second performance, the duos must dazzle both the panel and the audience at home with their "show dance". Once all eight routines are complete, the phone lines will open, giving viewers a chance to decide which of the competitors will be progressing through to the final three.

8.00 Casualty. Christmas Eve arrives, and a nervous Cal goes to meet his birth mother. Meanwhile, Dixie learns her superiors are investigating Jess's complaint.

8.50 The National Lottery Live. Frankie Bridge of The Saturdays joins Ore Oduba to push the Lotto button as the all-important winning numbers are revealed.

9.00 Strictly Come Dancing: The Results. The final three couples revisit their favourite routines in one last round of performances, before viewers decide which star should be named the champion. Last in the series.

10.10 BBC News; Weather.

10.30 Match of the Day. Highlights of the latest games, including Manchester United v Norwich City and Everton v Leicester City; National Lottery Update.

11.55 The Apprentice. The five remaining candidates must face the interview process . (R)

12.55 Weather for the Week Ahead. **1.00** BBC News.

BBC2

6.00 Race to Super Bowl 50. (R) **6.50** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **7.45** Africa's Fishing Leopards: Natural World. (R) **8.45 Film:** Underdog. (2007) **10.00 Film:** Bridge to Terabithia. (2007) **11.30** Escape to the Country. (R) **12.00** Best Christmas Bakes Ever. **12.45 Film:** The Bishop's Wife. (1947) Fantasy, starring Cary Grant. **2.30 Film:** Splash! (1984) Romantic fantasy comedy, with Tom Hanks and Daryl Hannah. **4.10** Flog It! **5.00 Film:** Dad's Army. (1971) British comedy, starring Arthur Lowe.

6.35 The Perfect Morecambe & Wise Christmas Special. Compilations each featuring a selection of classic sketches and routines from the comedy duo's shows. (R)

7.05 Japan: Earth's Enchanted Islands. Life on Japan's northernmost island Hokkaido, a place where tough animals and ingenious people have adapted to the extremes of the seasons. Last in the series. (R)

8.05 Porridge. Mackay and Barraclough discover Fletch is making booze in his cell and the crafty con seems certain to spend Christmas in solitary. Festive special from 1976, with Ronnie Barker. (R)

8.50 Rudolf Nureyev – Dance to Freedom. Dramatised documentary detailing the story of Rudolf Nureyev, the Soviet ballet dancer who defected to the West in 1961, becoming a living legend in the process. Bolshoi Ballet star Artem Ovcharenko steps into Nureyev's slippers, recreating the Kirov Ballet company's 1961 European tour, which provided the dancer with the opportunity to defect at Paris's Le Bourget airport on June 16.

10.20 QI XL. Jenny Eclair, Johnny Vegas and Bill Bailey join regular panellist Alan Davies for an extended edition of the quiz show, in which host Stephen Fry offers up seasonal merriment.

11.05 The Rise of James Brown: Mr Dynamite. Documentary charting the singer's journey from impoverished beginnings to becoming one of the biggest names in music, and revealing his pivotal role in the civil rights movement. (R)

12.45 Film: SoulBoy. (2010) Drama, starring Martin Compston , Felicity Jones and Nichola Burley. **2.05** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Fort Boyard Ultimate Challenge. **6.25** Pat & Stan. (R) **6.30** Pat & Stan. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Sooty. (R) **7.25** Super 4. (R) **7.40** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **7.50** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.00** The Aquabats! Super Show! (R) **8.30** Thunderbirds Are Go. **9.00** Jessie. **9.25** Murder, She Wrote. (R) **10.20** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **11.20** ITV News; Weather. **11.30 Film:** The Mirror Crack'd. (1980) **1.35** Celebrity Squares. (R) **2.15** Doc Martin. (R) **3.15** Midsomer Murders. (R) **5.10** Regional Programme : Weather.**5.20** ITV News; Weather. **5.35** Keep It in the Family Christmas Special.

6.35 Film: The Hobbit: An Unexpected Journey. (2012) Unassuming hobbit Bilbo Baggins is pulled out of his comfortable life when Gandalf the wizard volunteers him for a dangerous quest. He joins a party of dwarves who are on a mission to reclaim their lost homeland, which has been taken over by a dragon. The first part of Peter Jackson's fantasy adventure trilogy based on JRR Tolkien's novel, starring Martin Freeman, Ian McKellen and Richard Armitage.

9.45 The Jonathan Ross Show. The host is given yet another chance to indulge his geek side as he welcomes Harrison Ford to take a seat on the sofa. The veteran Hollywood star will no doubt face a barrage of questions about the making of the highly anticipated Star Wars: The Force Awakens, which hit cinemas on Thursday last week. Also visiting the studio are David Walliams, who is fronting Channel 4's countdown of the nation's favourite children's book this festive season, and Jamie Oliver, whose health-oriented recipe book Everyday Super Food hit shelves back in August. Plus, singer-songwriter Jess Glynne performs.

10.50 ITV News; Weather.

11.05 Film: Notting Hill. (1999) A London bookshop owner falls for a glamorous Hollywood film star, but intrusive media interest makes for a tricky relationship. Romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Julia Roberts, Rhys Ifans and Emma Chambers.

1.20 Jackpot247. **3.00** The Jeremy Kyle Show USA. (R) **3.40** ITV Nightscreen.

CHANNEL 4

6.15 Great Ethiopian Run 2015. **7.10** Survival of the Fittest. **7.35** Snowman Triathlon. **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **9.00** The Morning Line. **10.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **10.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.00** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **11.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.00** The Simpsons. (R) **12.30** The Simpsons. (R) **1.00** The Simpsons. (R) **1.30** Channel 4 Racing. Live coverage from Ascot and Haydock Park. **4.00** Channel 4 News. **4.10** The Simpsons. (R) **4.40** The Simpsons. **5.10 Film:** Arthur Christmas. (2011) Animated comedy, with the voice of James McAvoy.

7.00 The World's Weirdest Weather. Featuring geysers erupting in the middle of a city, clouds that look like they have been cut with a razor, red rainbows, zombie trees and bridges struck by strong winds that are so fierce the structures start to wobble.

8.00 Film: Star Trek. (2009) The trainee crew members of the starship Enterprise embark on their maiden flight, which pits them against a Romulan commander from the future who is planning a horrific revenge on those he blames for a tragedy in his own time. Sci-fi adventure based on the original TV series, starring Chris Pine, Zachary Quinto, Eric Bana, Zoe Saldana and Leonard Nimoy.

10.30 Film: Watchmen. (2009) At the height of the Cold War, former superheroes discover a conspiracy when one of their number is murdered. Comic-book drama, starring Patrick Wilson and Jackie Earle Haley.

1.30 TFI Friday Christmas Special. Chris Evans is joined by co-host Alan Partridge. Guests include James Corden, Jack Whitehall and Lee Mack, and there is music by Sir Tom Jones, Bryan Adams and Lianne La Havas. (R) **2.55** Hollyoaks. Omnibus. While Porsche encourages Cleo to go to the police, Lindsey uses Mercedes's drinking habit to her advantage, and Grace and Darren are shocked when Charlie starts talking. (R) **5.05** Hugh's 3 Good Things. The chefs create dishes using nuts. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall uses walnuts to make baklava, accompanied by ricotta and honeycomb with hazelnuts stirred in. (R) **5.20** Hugh's 3 Good Things: Best Bites. Cooking with chocolate. (R) **5.25** Location, Location, Location. Couples search for their ideal properties. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake! **8.55** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. **9.30** The Saturday Show. **11.30 Film:** A Country Christmas Story. (2013) **1.20 Film:** This Christmas. (2007) Comedy drama, starring Delroy Lindo. **3.30 Film:** Angel at Christmas. (2009) Premiere. Comedy drama, starring Kari Hawker. **5.10 Film:** A Boyfriend for Christmas. (2004) Romantic drama, starring Kelli Williams.

6.55 Crackers About Christmas. Eccentric people who are always in the festive holiday spirit, including a man who celebrates Christmas every day and whose daily routine includes posting himself cards, breakfasting on mince pies and sherry, wrapping and opening presents, dining with guests on roast turkey and watching the Queen's speech. Plus, a woman whose home is full of Christmas baubles, and a man who has set up his own school for Santas. (R)

7.55 Michael Buble's Christmas Songbook. The Canadian crooner sings Christmas classics, joined on stage in Vancouver by Rod Stewart, Blake Shelton, Carly Rae Jepsen, Elmo and Oscar the Grouch. (R)

8.55 5 News Weekend.

9.00 Football League Tonight. Kelly Cates and George Riley present extended highlights of the weekend's matches, including Brighton & Hove Albion v Middlesbrough and Rotherham v Hull City in the Championship. Plus, all the goals from Leagues One and Two, where match-ups included Coventry City v Oldham Athletic and Hartlepool United v Plymouth Argyle. There is also a round-up of the main talking points, and interviews with a selection of players and managers.

10.30 Britain's Favourite Abba Songs. A countdown of the Swedish pop group's 20 most popular songs, with celebrity fans including Jane McDonald and Liz McClarnon introducing their favourite clips.

11.55 Abba: Live in Concert. The Swedish band in concert during their six-night residence at London's Wembley Arena in November 1979, featuring hits including Voulez-Vous, Dancing Queen and Waterloo. (R)

1.10 SuperCasino. **3.10** Meet the Psychopaths. (R) **4.00** Benefits Britain: Life on the Dole. (R) **4.50** Make It Big. (R) **5.45** Angels of Jarm. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three
7.00 Don't Tell the Bride **8.00** Top Gear Botswana Special **9.00 Film:** Enemy of the State (1998) **11.05** Family Guy **1.20** The Mighty Boosh

BBC Four
7.00 Empire of the Seas: How the Navy Forged the Modern World **8.00** The Golden Age of Steam Railways **9.00** The Bridge **11.00** 10 Things You Didn't Know About Earthquakes **12.00** 10 Things You Didn't Know About Tsunamis

ITV2
11.20 Scorpion **12.15** Funniest Ever You've Been Framed! **1.15 Film:** Mr Magorium's Wonder Emporium (2007) **3.10 Film:** Santa Baby (2006) **5.00** Merry Christmas Mr Bean **5.35 Film:** Ella Enchanted (2004) **7.25 Film:** Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas (1993) **9.00 Film:** The Bourne Supremacy (2004) **11.10** Celebrity Juice: Bestest Bits 2015 Part 1 **12.10** Through the Christmas Keyhole **1.15** Tricked **2.10** Viral Tap **2.45 Film:** Baby Mama (2008) **4.25** The Almost Impossible Gameshow

ITV3
11.50 Film: Swallows and Amazons (1974) **1.40** By Royal Appointment **2.50 Film:** The Queen (2006) **4.55 Film:** Columbo: It's All in the Game (1993) **6.55** Rosemary & Thyme **8.00** Housewife, 49 **10.00** Lewis **12.05** A Touch of Frost **2.10 Film:** Murder on the Orient Express (1974) **4.20** Wycliffe **5.15** On the Buses

ITV4
12.05 Storage Wars: New York **1.05** Storage Wars: Texas **2.05 Film:** Jeremiah Johnson (1972) **4.20** Fifth Gear **5.20** Formula E: Sound of the Future **6.00** Live FIA Formula E Championship. The Punta del Este ePrix. **8.30 Film:** Jackie Chan's First Strike (1996) **10.15 Film:** Rambo III (1988) **12.20 Film:** Police Academy (1984) **2.15 Film:** Quadrophenia (1979)

E4
12.00 The Goldbergs **1.00** The Big Bang Theory **3.00 Film:** Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events (2004) **5.00** The Big Bang Theory **9.00 Film:** The Inbetweeners Movie (2011) **11.00** The Inbetweeners Top 10 Moments **12.00** The Inbetweeners **2.15** The Inbetweeners Top 10 Moments **3.10** How to... Get Stinking Rich **3.35** How I Met Your Mother **4.20** The Mindy Project **4.40** Revenge

Film4
11.00 Arrietty (2010) **1.00** A Knight's Tale (2001) **3.40** The Longest Day (1962) **7.10** Men in Black II (2002) **9.00** Life of Pi (2012) **11.25** WolfCop (2014) **1.00** Thirst (2009) **3.45** Close

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CHOICE

Kara Tointon

The Sound of Music Live! (ITV, 7.30pm)
You can't beat a bit of The Sound of Music at Christmas - the film version is sure to pop up in the schedules at some point, but ITV is really pushing the boat out by launching a live version of the musical to help celebrate the movie's 50th anniversary. Perhaps the biggest is surprise is the identity of the lead actress - Kara Tointon, who plays novice nun-turned-governess. We know she can act and her dance skills were revealed when she won Strictly Come Dancing in 2010, but can she sing? We'll find out tonight when she takes to the stage alongside West End and Downton Abbey star Julian Ovenden, who portrays Captain Von Trapp. Katherine Kelly, Alexander Armstrong and Mel Giedroyc also appear.

BBC1

6.00 Breakfast. **7.35** Match of the Day. (R) **9.00** The Andrew Marr Show. **10.00** Fern Britton Meets Baroness Brady. **11.00** Homes Under the Hammer. (R) **12.00** Bargain Hunt. (R) **1.00** BBC News; Weather. **1.15 Film:** Rise of the Guardians. (2012) Animated adventure, with the voice of Chris Pine. **2.40** Merry Madagascar. (R) **3.05 Film:** Toy Story 3. (2010) Animated adventure, with the voices of Tom Hanks and Tim Allen. **4.45** The Christmas Big Sing. **5.25** BBC News. **5.40** Regional Programme. **5.50** Countryfile: Cornish Coastal Christmas.

6.50 Sports Personality of the Year 2015. Gary Lineker, Clare Balding and Gabby Logan present this year's ceremony live from the SSE Arena in Belfast, where the successor to Lewis Hamilton will be crowned. Hamilton himself is among the 12 contenders, and will be hoping to land back-to-back wins at this ceremony, having delivered another Formula 1 world title in 2015 to maintain his recent dominance of the sport. The other nominees are world champion athletes Jessica Ennis-Hill, Mo Farah and Greg Rutherford, Davis Cup hero Andy Murray, footballer Lucy Bronze, newly crowned world heavyweight champion Tyson Fury, cyclists Chris Froome and Lizzie Armitstead, swimmer Adam Peaty, gymnast Max Whitlock and former Leeds Rhinos captain Kevin Sinfield – the first-ever candidate from rugby league. In addition, awards will be handed out in categories such as Team of the Year, Coach of the Year and Unsung Hero, and the Helen Rollason Award will be bestowed upon someone who epitomises courage and has the ability to inspire others.

9.00 The Apprentice. The finalists must launch their business in the final task, including creating a brand and unveiling their campaign to an audience of industry experts. Last in the series.

11.00 BBC News.
11.20 Regional Programme.
11.30 Have I Got a Bit More News for You. Compilation of the satirical quiz, looking back at the big news events of 2015, with team captains Ian Hislop and Paul Merton, and guest hosts and panellists. Last in the series.
12.10 Weather for the Week Ahead.
12.15 BBC News.

BBC2

6.15 Big Dreams Small Spaces. (R) **7.15** Countryfile. (R) **8.15** An Island Parish: Falklands. (R) **8.45** Natural World: Beavers Behaving Badly. (R) **9.45** Saturday Kitchen Best Bites. **11.15** Simply Nigella: Christmas Special. (R) **12.15** MOTD2 Extra. **1.00** Hi-de-Hi! (R) **1.45** Equestrian: Olympia. **4.30** Some Mothers Do 'Ave 'Em. (R) **5.20** Flog It!

6.25 The Good Life. Margo and Jerry are forced to spend Christmas with Tom and Barbara. Seasonal special from 1977. (R)

6.50 Christmas University Challenge. New series. Jeremy Paxman chairs the first in a series of special festive edition of the quiz, with famous graduates of University College London and the University of Birmingham.

7.20 To The Manor Born: 25th Anniversary Special. Christmas revival from 2007. Audrey prepares to celebrate her wedding anniversary, but finds the event threatened by secrets from her husband's past and her feckless nephew. (R)

8.20 Film: Safe Haven. (2013) Premiere. A woman trying to make a fresh start in a coastal town realises she must confront the dark past she is running from. Romantic drama, with Julianne Hough and Josh Duhamel.

10.10 Live at the Apollo Christmas Special 2015. Nina Conti hosts a special festive edition of the stand-up show from the Hammersmith Apollo, featuring Tanyalee Davis, Hal Cruttenden and Josh Widdicombe. Last in the series.

10.55 Family Guy. Peter, Joe, Cleveland and Quagmire help throw Jesus an important birthday party. Animation following the misadventures of America's disaster-prone Griffin family. (R)

11.15 The Javone Prince Show. The actor pokes fun at the more ridiculous elements of modern life via stand-up performances, comedy sketches and music. (R)

11.45 Country Strife: Abz on the Farm. Former boy band member Abz Love and his girlfriend Vicky Fallon try to start their own smallholding in Wales. (R)

12.15 Special Forces – Ultimate Hell Week. (R) **2.15** Sign Zone: Countryfile. (R) **3.15** Holby City. (R) **4.15** James Martin – Home Comforts at Christmas. (R) **4.55** This Is BBC Two.

ITV

6.00 CITV: Fort Boyard Ultimate Challenge. **6.25** Pat & Stan. (R) **6.30** Pat & Stan. (R) **6.35** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **6.50** Dino Dan: Trek's Adventures. (R) **7.00** Signed Stories: Share a Story. (R) **7.05** Oddbods. (R) **7.10** Sooty. (R) **7.25** Super 4. (R) **7.40** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **7.50** Mr Bean: The Animated Series. (R) **8.00** The Aquabats! Super Show! (R) **8.30** Lego DC Comics: Batman Be-Leaguered. (R) **9.00** Jessie. **9.25** FIA Formula E Championship. **10.20** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **11.20** ITV News; Weather. **11.25** The Jeremy Kyle Show. (R) **12.30** The Unforgettable Dick Emery. (R) **1.00** Doc Martin. (R) **3.00** Midsomer Murders. (R) **5.00** Tipping Point for Text Santa. (R)

6.00 Regional Programme; Weather.
6.15 ITV News; Weather.

6.30 Jekyll and Hyde. Robert has no wish to find the monster that is killing wealthy young men, but the trail is too compelling to resist. It leads him to a fight with a beautiful vampire who shocks him with the news that she's his sister, Olalla. She also tells him Dance is alive and being rebuilt by eel creatures. Robert is suspicious of a trap and sets a test – if she can turn into a Jekyll he'll believe her. Fantasy adventure, starring Tom Bateman and Wallis Day.

7.30 The Sound of Music Live! Popular musical The Sound of Music is brought to life on soundstages at London's Three Mills Studio, in a live TV dramatisation of the timeless story of Maria and the von Trapp family. Based on the original, the drama will include classic songs such as How Do You Solve a Problem Like Maria, Edelweiss, Do-Re-Mi, My Favourite Things, Climb Ev'ry Mountain, and the title song. Starring Kara Tointon, Julia Ovenden, Katherine Kelly and Alexander Armstrong.

10.05 ITV News; Weather.

10.20 Film: Love Actually. (2003) Interlinked tales of several people in search of love. Richard Curtis's romantic comedy, with Hugh Grant, Martine McCutcheon, Emma Thompson, Colin Firth, Bill Nighy and Liam Neeson.

12.45 Jackpot247. Interactive gaming. **3.00** Motorsport UK. **3.50** ITV Nightscreen. Text-based information service. **5.05** The Jeremy Kyle Show. Guests air their differences. (R)

CHANNEL 4

6.20 The King of Queens. (R) **6.45** The King of Queens. (R) **7.10** The King of Queens. (R) **7.35** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.00** Everybody Loves Raymond. (R) **8.30** Frasier. (R) **9.00** Frasier. (R) **9.30** Sunday Brunch. **12.30** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **12.55** The Big Bang Theory. (R) **1.25 Film:** Hachi: A Dog's Tale. (2009) Fact-based family drama, starring Richard Gere. **3.15 Film:** The Addams Family. (1991) Black comedy, starring Anjelica Huston. **5.10** Channel 4 News. **5.30** Ice Age: A Mammoth Christmas. (R)

6.00 Film: Home Alone. (1990) A boy has to fend for himself when he is accidentally left behind after his family jets off to Paris for Christmas. The youngster initially enjoys his freedom, but is soon forced to resort to ingenious booby traps to defend the family home from two dim-witted burglars. Comedy, starring Macaulay Culkin, Joe Pesci, Daniel Stern, John Heard, Catherine O'Hara and John Candy.

8.00 Bear Goes Wild with Barack Obama. Bear Grylls is joined by the US president for his latest adventure. The pair go on a trek across the Alaskan wilderness, travelling through dense forest and glacial outwash to visit the Exit Glacier, where they observe the effects of climate change first hand. Along the way, they climb trees to gather berries and cook salmon on a campfire, sharing their thoughts on family, fears and faith.

9.00 Homeland. Carrie finds herself with a lead to follow. Penultimate episode of the fifth series of the thriller following a team of CIA agents battling terrorists and problems in their personal lives. Claire Danes stars.

10.00 Gogglebox. Capturing the households' instant reactions to what they are watching on TV from the comfort of their own sofas. (R)

11.00 Film: Four Christmases. (2008) A couple struggle to make it through four family Christmases on the same day as they see each of their divorced parents in turn. Comedy, with Vince Vaughn and Reese Witherspoon.

12.40 Film: Airplane! (1980) Spoof disaster movie, starring Robert Hays. **2.10** Alan Carr: Chatty Man. (R) **3.05** The Undateables: Two Weddings and a Baby. (R) **3.55** Four in a Bed. (R)

CHANNEL 5

6.00 Milkshake!: Peppa Pig. **6.05** Bananas in Pyjamas. (R) **6.20** Angelina Ballerina. (R) **6.30** Bob the Builder. (R) **6.45** Tickety Toc. (R) **6.55** Zack and Quack. **7.05** Roobarb and Custard Too. (R) **7.15** Make Way for Noddy. (R) **7.25** Paw Patrol. (R) **7.40** Little Princess. (R) **7.50** Pip Ahoy! (R) **8.05** Blaze and the Monster Machines. (R) **8.30** Ben and Holly's Little Kingdom. (R) **8.45** Wanda and the Alien. (R) **8.55** Toby's Travelling Circus. (R) **9.10** Jelly Jamm. (R) **9.30** LazyTown. (R) **9.55** Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles. (R) **10.30** Football League Tonight. (R) **12.00 Film:** Surf's Up. (2007) Animated comedy, with the voice of Jeff Bridges. **1.35 Film:** The Christmas Switch. (2014) Fantasy, starring Brian Krause and Cedric Smith. **3.20 Film:** Christmas in the City. (2013) Premiere. Drama, starring Ashley Williams. **5.05 Film:** Pinocchio. (1940) Disney animated adventure, with the voice of Dick Jones.

6.45 5 News Weekend.

6.50 Film: Hellboy II: The Golden Army. (2008) The demon superhero, aided by a team from the Bureau of Paranormal Research and Defence, leads the fight against renegade elf Prince Nuada who is intent on reawakening an unstoppable robot army and bringing about the demise of mankind. Action fantasy sequel directed by Guillermo del Toro, starring Ron Perlman, Selma Blair, Doug Jones and Luke Goss. Edited for language and violence.

9.00 Film: War of the Worlds. (2005) A divorced father's rare weekend with his two estranged children descends into horror when alien war machines rise from beneath Earth and begin to systematically destroy every human being in their path – leaving the man with the dangerous task of getting his kids to safety. Steven Spielberg's sci-fi thriller, based on HG Wells' novel, with Tom Cruise, Dakota Fanning, Justin Chatwin, Miranda Otto and Tim Robbins.

11.10 Britain's Favourite Christmas Songs. A countdown of songs guaranteed to make any Christmas party go with a swing, including classics by the Jackson 5, Jona Lewie, Band Aid, the Pogues and Kirsty MacColl, and Slade. (R)

2.05 SuperCasino. Viewers get the chance to take part in live interactive gaming. **4.00** House Doctor.(R) **4.25** Make It Big. (R) **5.45** Angels of Jarm. (R)

DIGITAL

BBC Three
7.00 First Flight **7.10 Film:** G-Force (2009) **8.30** Don't Tell the Bride – Christmas on Ice **9.30** Top Gear: Polar Challenge **10.35** Russell Howard's Good News Extra **11.15** Family Guy **12.00** American Dad! **12.45** Josh **1.15** The Mighty Boosh

BBC Four
7.00 Blood and Gold: The Making of Spain with Simon Sebag Montefiore **8.00** Westminster Abbey **9.00** Nat King Cole: Afraid of the Dark **10.30** Nina Simone & Me with Laura Mvula **11.00** Bruce Springsteen: The Ties That Bind **11.55** Bruce Springsteen & The E Street Band: Live From The River Tour 1980

ITV2
11.45 Keep It in the Family Christmas Special **12.50** You've Been Framed at Christmas! **1.20 Film:** Peter Pan (2003) **3.30 Film:** Beethoven's Christmas Adventure (2011) **5.20** Catchphrase Christmas Special **6.25** The X Factor Winner's Story 2015 **7.30** You've Been Framed at Christmas! **9.00 Film:** The Bourne Ultimatum (2007) **11.15** Celebrity Juice: Christmas Special **12.00** Release the Hounds: Jingle Hell II **1.05** Tricked **2.00 Film:** Cirque du Freak: The Vampire's Assistant (2009)

ITV3
11.50 Film: Columbo: It's All in the Game (1993) **1.50 Film:** Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory (1971) **3.55** Clash of the Santas **5.55** Michael Bublé: At Home for Christmas **7.30** Lewis **9.30** Inspector Morse **11.45** A Touch of Frost **1.50** Wycliffe **2.45** On the Buses **3.10** ITV3 Nightscreen **3.40** Emmerdale

ITV4
11.20 The Car Chasers **11.50** Pawn Stars **1.35 Film:** No Name on the Bullet (1959) **3.15 Film:** The Appaloosa (1966) **5.20 Film:** Ice Cold in Alex (1958) **8.00** The Celebrity Chase **9.00 Film:** The Interpreter (2005) **11.40 Film:** Tin Cup (1996) **2.25 Film:** Spider (2002)

E4
12.30 Couples Come Dine with Me **2.35** The Big Bang Theory **6.25 Film:** The Twilight Saga: New Moon (2009) **9.00 Film:** The Inbetweeners 2 (2014) **11.00** The Inbetweeners Go Global **12.05** The Inbetweeners **2.20** The Inbetweeners Go Global **3.15** How to Be a Grown Up **3**

Film4
11.00 Porco Rosso (1992) **1.00** Parental Guidance (2012) **3.05** Bride Wars (2009) **4.50** Evolution (2001) **6.50** Men in Black 3 (2012) **9.00** Iron Man 2 (2010) **11.25** Daredevil (2003) **1.30** 10 Years (2011) **3.40** Close

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Sandwell Chronicle Thursday, December 17, 2015

FILM CHOICES

MONDAY
White Christmas, Channel 4, 11.50am
Two nightclub entertainers stage a series of shows to save an old friend's winter resort with the help of a talented singing sister act. Musical, with Bing Crosby and Danny Kaye. (1954)

TUESDAY
Shrek the Third, BBC1, 3.50pm
The bad-tempered ogre finds himself in the unwelcome position of being next in line for the throne. Animated comedy, with the voices of Mike Myers, Cameron Diaz, Justin Timberlake, Eddie Murphy, Antonio Banderas and Rupert Everett. (2007)

WEDNESDAY
Bridget Jones's Diary, ITV, 10.45pm
A single woman begins a new year with resolutions to find love, quit her bad habits and take a step up the career ladder. Romantic comedy based on Helen Fielding's novel, starring Renee Zellweger, Hugh Grant and Colin Firth. (2001)

Bridget Jones's Diary, Wednesday, ITV, 10.45pm

CHRISTMAS EVE
It's a Wonderful Life, Channel 4, 2.15pm
AA suicidal small-town businessman is visited by an angel who tries to change his mind by showing him the good he has done. Fantasy drama, starring James Stewart and Donna Reed. (1946)

CHRISTMAS DAY
The Muppet Christmas Carol, Channel 4, 1.45pm
A miser is encouraged to mend his ways at Christmas when three spirits show him his past, present and what the future holds. Puppet comedy, with Michael Caine and Steven Mackintosh. (1992)
The Wizard of Oz, Channel 5, 3.10pm
Youngster Dorothy Gale is whisked over the rainbow by a tornado into the magical land of Oz, where she inadvertently kills a wicked witch – incurring the wrath of another. Setting out to find the wizard who can show her a way home, she is joined on her journey by a scarecrow, a tin man and a cowardly lion, who all hope their own wishes will be granted. Musical fantasy, with Judy Garland, Ray Bolger, Jack Haley, Bert Lahr and Frank Morgan. (1939)

The birth of a comedy with an army of fans

Who do you think you are kidding Mr Hitler? Whenever the crusty old voice of Bud Flanagan can be heard singing that line, you know that Dad's Army is about to start and what will follow is approximately 25 minutes of mayhem, one-liners and catchphrases from Captain Mainwaring, Sergeant Wilson, Corporal Jones and the rest of the platooon.

Ah yes, those catchphrases... Even now, sentences such as, "You stupid boy," "I'm going to get you Napoleon," "We're doomed" and, of course, "Don't panic!" are still well known – which is probably down to the fact that the Beeb always seems to be repeating the show.

It's actually been 47 years since the boys first donned their uniforms and 38 since they hung them up again, but those nine years in between were full of humour which hasn't dated one little bit.

There's an old saying for authors: Write what you know. Jimmy Perry proved he wasn't a "stupid boy" when he did just that and, along with writing partner David Croft, turned his World War Two Home Guard experiences into Dad's Army.

"We wrote the show together and it became this huge success," says Perry, with a hint of surprise still in his voice. "I always thought it was a good idea but it totally overwhelmed us. I think the secret was that everything was right. It was one of those rare things. The cast was right, the time and the subject was right."

However, not everybody was as enamoured with the idea – or the actors taking part – as Perry. And now, in this drama, viewers can learn more about how the sitcom was born and eventually made it to our screens against the odds.

The BBC has a good track record when it comes to producing 'making-of' dramas. The Curse of Steptoe, The Road to Coronation Street and An Adventure in Space and Time all received critical acclaim, so there's every reason to believe that the latest in the genre will be just as enthralling. The timing is good too – Dad's Army remains a mainstay of the BBC schedule and a revamped film version is due for release in February.

Paul Ritter and Richard Dormer play Perry and Croft respectively, and the drama takes us from when Perry had the initial idea in 1967 to the broadcast of the first episode a year later.

John Sessions and Julian Sands take the key roles of Arthur Lowe and John Le Mesurier; it's hard to imagine anybody playing the characters those venerable old actors took, but Captain Mainwaring was originally offered to Jon Pertwee, while Le Mesurier only accepted the role of Sgt Wilson because the series was going to be filmed in Norfolk, a county he loved.

Sadly, most of the original cast are no longer with us – only Ian Lavender and Frank Williams (Private Pike and Rev Timothy Farthing respectively) remain. Croft also passed away in 2011.

"I feel a tremendous sense of warmth and sadness that most of those involved are no longer with us," says Perry. "But I also have a sense of pride that I created such a show."

Sarah Alexander, Sally Phillips and Keith Allen also star.

We're Doomed! The Dad's Army Story, Tuesday, BBC2, 9pm

BEST OF THE REST

MONDAY
The John Bishop Christmas Show
BBC1, 9pm
The Liverpudlian comedian returns for his third all-singing, all-dancing, festive extravaganza and is joined on stage at the Lyceum Theatre in London's West End by a selection of the most exciting names in music and comedy. The line-up features music from Australian pop star and actress Kylie Minogue, chart-topping singer-songwriter Jess Glynne and 2009 X Factor runner-up and TV presenter Olly Murs, while the laughs are supplied by comedians Sarah Millican, Danny Bhoy, Tom Allen and Andy Askins.

Bafta Celebrates Downton Abbey
ITV, 9pm
Jonathan Ross hosts a star-studded event at London's Richmond Theatre honouring the ITV drama ahead of its final episode on Christmas Day. There are reports from behind the scenes with cast and crew to provide an insight into one of the worldês most popular shows, while creator Julian Fellowes takes to the stage to chat about its origins and secrets. Maggie Smith and Hugh Bonneville perform a specially written sketch, there are performances by Kiri Te Kanawa and Julian Ovenden, and Julie Walters presents the award to Fellowes and the cast and crew.

TUESDAY
Luther
BBC1, 9pm
With the eponymous detective dogged by ghosts from his past, a cold case might be the key to unlocking a mystery that's tormenting him. Meanwhile, with the cannibalistic serial killer still at large, Benny's hacking skills have revealed a list of hundreds of potential victims. Realising it's all part of a macabre end game, the crime buster is forced to put himself and new colleague Emma into the heart of danger to try and stop the killer. Idris Elba and Laura Haddock head the cast.

WEDNESDAY
Prey
ITV, 9pm
As Murdoch continues with the search for his daughter, he is forced into one last extraordinary mission before Lucy can be freed. But, as a wanted man, it is a near-impossible task, and he must fight to get her to safety before the relentless Reinhardt catches her prey. Concluding instalment of the thriller, following the story of a prison officer who is forced on the run with a young female prisoner when his daughter is kidnapped. Starring Philip Glenister, Rosie Cavaliero, MyAnna Buring and Nathan Stewart-Jarrett. Last in the series.

Prey, Wednesday, ITV, 9pm

CHRISTMAS EVE
Peter Kay: 20 Years of Funny
BBC1, 9.05pm
It is nearly 20 years since Peter Kay was named North West Comedian of the Year 1996, beating the likes of Johnny Vegas to the title at a show hosted by Dave Spikey. This one-off hour-long programme looks back at the much-loved comedian and actor's life from his childhood growing up in Bolton, to the places and people who have influenced him. It reveals how Peter began his journey into the world of comedy and his eventual rise to become a household name, playing to a record-breaking 1.2 million fans on his The Tour That Doesn't Tour Tour.

CHRISTMAS DAY
Downton Abbey – The Finale
ITV, 8.45pm
Julian Fellowes bids farewell to the Crawleys with one last festive special, catching up with the Abbey's residents at the tail-end of 1925. Mary endeavours to build bridges, but Edith's secret continues to pose a threat. As Henry settles into the role of husband, scars left by Charlie's death are slow to heal, while Carson struggles to come to terms with developments that prove even he is not invulnerable to change. Spratt's moonlighting venture is threatened by the conniving of Denker, and Daisy may have missed her chance with an admirer.

Our Cilla
ITV, 10.45pm
The death of singer and TV presenter Cilla Black in August 2015 shocked the showbusiness community. In this programme, stars including Ringo Starr, Cliff Richard, Elaine Paige, Christopher Biggins, Paul O'Grady and Lynda La Plante join members of the entertainer's family and other close friends to reveal the woman behind the screen persona. Alongside rare interviews and archive footage, the candid, humorous and surprising insights of the people who knew her best chart the journey of a woman who broke boundaries, both in terms of class and gender.

BRAIN GYM No.356

Codeword

Each number in the grid represents a different letter of the alphabet and every letter of the alphabet is used. Use the given letter(s) to the right of the main grid to start you off.

14	24	16	22	■	24	17	14	20	11	15	20	13
2	■	22	■	■	21	■	■	4	■	10	■	20
16	■	26	12	3	13	13	21	20	■	3	■	21
11	3	15	■	■	■	3	■	■	26	2	10	20
8	■	20	■	3	18	2	3	■	■	25	■	15
■	3	9	20	1	■	22	■	23	21	3	6	20
■	■	■	■	21	■	15	■	3	■	■	■	■
20	22	26	2	20	■	21	■	12	20	9	15	■
22	■	3	■	■	14	20	10	4	■	2	■	25
14	16	19	20	■	■	26	■	■	■	17	24	3
24	■	16 I	■	17	3	26	5	7	2	21	■	14
16	■	22 N	■	2	■	■	2	■	■	16	■	24
22	20	23	3	15	16	19	20	■	26	11	3	10

1	14
2	15
3	16 I
4	17
5	18
6	19
7	20
8	21
9	22 N
10	23
11	24
12	25
13	26

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTION:

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
F	M	Q	B	P	G	R	E	X	H	D	L	A
14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26
K	J	C	N	Z	W	O	Y	I	T	S	U	V

Double Crossword

Choose either quick or cryptic clues - both fit the same grid.

1	■	2	■	3	■	■	■	4	■	5	■	6
7						■	8					
	■		■		■	9	■		■		■	
10							■	11				
	■		■		■		■		■		■	
12				■	13					■	■	■
	■		■	14	■		■		■	15	■	16
■	■	■	17					■	18			
19	■	20	■		■		■	21	■		■	
22					■	23						
	■		■		■		■		■		■	
24						■	25					
	■		■		■	■	■		■		■	

Cryptic Clues:

Across

7. Make it possible to be lean? (6)
8. This stuff does have importance (6)
10. The team having batted are not in the pavilion (7)
11. Dodge a chasm (5)
12. Not one of the nonentities (4)
13. Filched a wrap (5)
17. Famous king was dunderhead - and greedy (5)
18. See 2 Down
22. Stale to the smallest degree (5)
23. Letters for sending to detached fort? (7)
24. Street abounding with contention (6)
25. His products presumably have the edge (6)

Down

1. About hearty echo (7)
2 & 18Ac. By which the chairman sees the actors are elected? (7,4)
3. It's clear learner is in distress (5)
4. Competent enough to do better than clever people (7)
5. Was a candidate, but didn't have a seat (5)
6. She's out of the singles now (5)
9. His trial goes over one's head (4,5)
14. Dog finds mother unyielding (7)
15. Spectacle? (7)
16. Correspondence from landlords? (7)
19. Those who study social division (5)
20. Annoy Henry (5)
21. A drink for the overweight? (5)

Quick Clues:

Across

7. Go back (6)
8. Tremble (6)
10. Speech (7)
11. Counterfeit (5)
12. Cudgel (4)
13. Corn (5)
17. Chute (5)
18. Win (4)
22. Proverb (5)
23. Interpret (7)
24. Ministers (6)
25. Glad (6)

Down

1. Crops (7)
2. Conceited (5-2)
3. Venomous snake (5)
4. Excess (7)
5. Prevent (5)
6. Avarice (5)
9. Licentious (9)
14. Feathers (7)
15. Nonpareil (7)
16. Unity (7)
19. Slap (5)
20. Drive out (5)
21. Reel (5)

Sudoku

	4				9	7	2	
		9						5
3			5	6		4		
	3			9				4
9			6	4	8		3	1
		4		1			6	
		8		5				6
5					6	1		
	6	1	2				9	

Fill in the grid below so that every column, every row and each of the 3x3 boxes contains all the digits from 1 to 9.

LAST WEEK'S SOLUTIONS >

5	4	3	1	6	7	9	8	2
2	9	7	4	3	8	6	5	1
1	6	8	5	2	9	3	4	7
9	3	2	6	8	5	1	7	4
7	8	5	3	1	4	2	6	9
4	1	6	7	9	2	8	3	5
6	2	4	8	7	1	5	9	3
3	5	1	9	4	6	7	2	8
8	7	9	2	5	3	4	1	6

LAST WEEK'S CROSSWORD SOLUTIONS: CRYPTIC - Across: 1 Backs; 4 Pulls up; 8 Air one's; 9 Views; 10 Toot; 11 Pickling; 13 Cuff; 14 Pool; 16 Obedient; 17 Esau; 20 Naomi; 21 Servant; 22 Settled; 23 Wages. Down: 1 Beat the bounds; 2 Cargo; 3 Sink; 4 Pistil; 5 Love-knot; 6 Special; 7 Post-graduates; 12 Official; 13 Cheroot; 15 Unused; 18 Slang; 19 Crow. QUICK - Across: 1 Ocean; 4 Descend; 8 Jealous; 9 Amiss; 10 Chef; 11 Domineer; 13 Eros; 14 Just; 16 Nauseous; 17 Main; 20 Bravo; 21 Inexact; 22 Element; 23 Dread. Down: 1 Objectionable; 2 Evade; 3 Noon; 4 Despot; 5 Spacious; 6 Evident; 7 Discriminated; 12 Lose hope; 13 Emulate; 15 Quaint; 18 Aware; 19 Herd.

Thinking space

Quiz

1. Which Biblical book mentions 'A land flowing with milk and honey'?
2. In which Shakespeare play does Caliban appear?
3. In which year did Canada adopt a maple leaf emblem for its flag?
4. Which Nazi leader was 'The Butcher of Lyon'?
5. How old was outlaw Clyde Barrow when he died?
6. When is the first day of Ramadan in 2016?
7. Who wrote Northanger Abbey?
8. To which country did Alexander Graham Bell emigrate in 1870?
9. What nationality was composer Dvorak?
10. With which of the arts would you associate Sir Alfred Munnings?

Last week's solutions:

Quiz: 1 Swan-upping; 2 David Copperfield; 3 Egypt; 4 A church; 5 Hyde Park; 6 A bird; 7 Alcazar; 8 Torino; 9 George Harrison; 10 Poland.

Niner: LEGATIONS

Niner

Each number from 1 to 9 represents a different letter. Solve the clues and insert the letters in the appropriate squares to discover a word which uses all nine letters.

2467 gives a school,
98457 gives a school subject,
1352732 gives another school subject.

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

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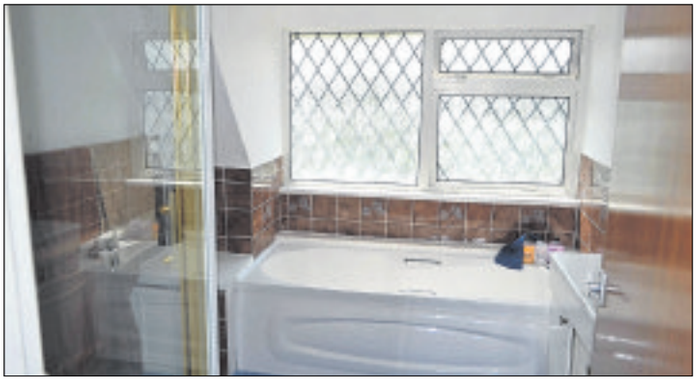

A GENEROUSLY proportioned detached enlarged chalet style house, offering four bedrooms in Redstone Drive, Highley comes with a rear garden that is believed to be one of the largest on the development.

It is for sale through McCartneys at £235,000.

It has an open porch, an entrance hall with a cupboard, WC, a lounge with a bay window giving views towards Billingsley, a mock fireplace with a wooden hearth and surround, two radiators and a pine staircase off, a dining area opening into a rear conservatory with a tiled floor and an archway from the dining area to the breakfast kitchen with a ceramic tiled floor and a half-tiled utility.

Carport

Off the first floor are four bedrooms and a half-tiled bathroom.

Outside is a former attached tandem double garage which is currently used as a store and an attached side carport. The front garden has lawn and attractive borders.

The rear garden includes a full width paved patio area and a rockery bed and high level lawned garden with borders and a timber greenhouse, summerhouse and timber store.

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The dual aspect kitchen/breakfast room has bespoke oak units with an Aga, a separate two ring ceramic hob, integral dishwasher, washing machine, fridge and a freezer.

There are two ground floor bedrooms sharing a shower room, both with French doors to the courtyard. To the first floor is the master bedroom suite with built-in wardrobes and a shower room. There is a further bedroom with built-in storage and a bathroom.

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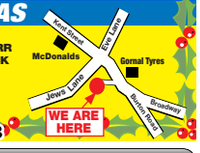

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3 Home & Services

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5 Business & Farming

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6 Property

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9 Local Information

public & legal notices

SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Borough Council of Sandwell (Church Road and Park Avenue, Rowley Regis) (Temporary Road Closures) Order No.2 2015, has made an Order to temporarily prohibit vehicles from proceeding along the following roads in Rowley Regis: 1) Church Road – Rowley Village to Longmeadow; 2) Park Avenue – Church Road to boundary of No.48 Park Avenue. The maximum duration is 18 months, but the work is expected to be completed by 19/02/16, effective from 25/01/16. Traffic will be diverted as follows: a) for Church Road via Hawes Lane, Tippity Green Portway Road, Hanover Road and vice-versa and via Hanover Road, Throne Road, Oldbury Road, Henderson Way, Birmingham Road, Rowley Village and vice-versa; b) for Park Avenue via Church Road, Newhall Road, Bell End, Park Avenue and vice versa. Purpose – gas main replacement by Balfour Beatty for National Grid Gas.

The Borough Council of Sandwell (Izons Turnover Bridge and Walsall Canal Public Right of Way, West Bromwich) (Temporary Footpath Closures) Order 2015, has made an Order to temporarily prohibit pedestrians from proceeding via Izons Turnover Bridge and along Walsall canal towpaths (public right of way) each side of Walsall canal. Northbound between the bridge and parallel to Navigation Way, southbound between the bridge and the footway across the canal joining the Caparo buildings. Work is expected to be completed by 31/03/16, effective from 4/01/16. There will be no diversion route signed for pedestrians. Purpose – works to the canal bridge and towpath.

The Borough Council of Sandwell (M6 J7 Gyratory, A34 Birmingham Road, Great Barr) (Temporary Road Closure) Order 2015, has made an Order to temporarily prohibit any vehicles from proceeding via the east side of M6 J7 Gyratory, Birmingham Road, Great Barr except for vehicles exiting via the northbound exit slip travelling towards the Scott Arms junction or vehicles wishing to access the motorway via M6 southbound entry slip. The maximum duration is 18 months, but the work is expected to be completed by 15/01/16 (03.30hrs) effective from 14/01/16 (21.30hrs). Traffic will be diverted via Birmingham Road, Queslett Road, around the island at Beacon Road and back via Queslett Road, Birmingham Road. Purpose – structural inspection of A34 viaduct.

SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL
Regeneration and Economy
Town and Country Planning Act 1990 (as amended)
Planning (Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas) Act 1990
Town and Country Planning (Development Management Procedure) (England) Order 2015

I hereby give notice that Sandwell Council has received the following applications under the planning acts which it is required to give public notice for the reason given at the beginning of each group of applications.

The application may affect the character or appearance of a conservation area.

DC/15/58769	Mr Sat Sanghera Cannon Tools	80 - 82 High Street Smethwick B66 1AQ	Proposed two storey extension to side and rear to create 2 No. additional commercial units on the ground floor, and conversion of first and second floors into 7 No. self contained flats.
This is a major application.			
DC/15/58814	Junction Propco SARL	Currys Unit 4 Axletree Way Wednesbury WS10 9QY	Proposed installation of new mezzanine floor space, alterations to elevations and associated works to provide 3 No. retail units.

Members of the public may inspect copies of these applications at Council House, Freeth Street, Oldbury, West Midlands, B69 3DE (between 8.00a.m. and 5.30p.m. Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, 9.00a.m. and 5.30p.m. Wednesday and 8.00a.m. to 5p.m. Friday) or via the Council's Public Access website (www.sandwell.gov.uk).

Anyone who wishes to make representations about these applications can do so via the website, or should write to the Council at the above address within 21 days (and 21 days for Listed Building or Conservation Area consent) of the date of this advertisement quoting the application reference number.

MR NICK BUBALO, Area Director – Regeneration and Economy

ENVIRONMENT AGENCY
ANNOUNCEMENT OF INTENTION NOT TO PREPARE AN ENVIRONMENTAL STATEMENT (Regulation 5 of the Environmental Impact Assessment (Land Drainage Improvement Works) Regulations 1999 as amended by SI 2005/1399 and SI 2006/618

RECONNECTING WOODGATE VALLEY

The Environment Agency gives notice that it proposes to carry out improvement works to the flood defences on the Bourn Brook in Woodgate Valley in the Vicinity of Lapal weir (SP 00005 83424) covering a distance of 0.07 kilometeres. The proposed improvement works will involve the following:

By-pass of Lapal weir on the the Bourn Brook at SP 00005 83424 in order to help improve the habitat and ecology of the brook and reduce erosion risk to the bridleway. Works will also be undertaken at SO 99963 83410 to reinstate a small area of erosion affecting the footpath.

The Environment Agency considers that the improvement works are not likely to have significant effects on the environment and does not intend to prepare an environmental statement in respect of them. Further information on the works and a copy of the environmental assessment can be obtained by contacting the Fradley Environment Agency Office (address below).

Any person wishing to make representations in relation to the likely environmental effects of the proposed improvement works should do so, in writing, to the address specified below, within 28 days of the date of publication of this notice.

Sangeetha Viswan, Reconnecting Woodgate Valley Project Manager
Sentinel House, 9 Wellington Crescent, Fradley Park, Lichfield
Staffordshire WS13 8RR

SANDWELL METROPOLITAN BOROUGH COUNCIL

The Borough Council of Sandwell (Cape Hill, Smethwick) (Temporary Road Closure) Order 2016, has made an Order to temporarily prohibit any vehicles from proceeding via Cape Hill, Smethwick between Montague Road and Windmill Lane. The maximum duration is 18 months, but the work is expected to be completed by 24/01/16 effective from 07/01/16. Traffic will be diverted via Raglan Road, Windmill Lane, Cape Hill and vice-versa. Purpose – facilitate surfacing works as part of the on-going local safety scheme.

IRENE IVY COPPER (Deceased)
Pursuant to the Trustee Act 1925 any persons having a claim against or an interest in the Estate of the above named, late of 45 Parsons Hill, Oldbury, West Midlands, who died on 08/11/2015, are required to send written particulars thereof to the undersigned on or before 24/02/2016, after which date the Estate will be distributed having regard only to the claims and interests of which they have had notice.
The Co-operative Legal Services,
Aztec 650, Aztec West, Almondsbury, Bristol BS32 4SD. AYO/3714020P/COPPER

10 Personals

personal

BRITISH INDIAN MAN
WLTM, English female, similar age, for dating nights in / out. Enjoys travelling, pictures and pubs.
Box Number P20162,
Express and Star,
Queen Street,
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

HELLO MR MAGIC
Love you loads and loads and loads.
Why and when.
Love, Mrs Magic.
X X X

IS THERE A CLASSY LADY
With old fashioned values from nice Family, 28-38, looking for a man of good upstanding, 6ft, well built, very much self motivated, who has been let down in the past.
Time to move forward with the right person.
Box Number P20163,
Express and Star,
Queen Street,
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

SINCERE MATURE GENT
WLTM a younger male, 20-40 for friendship. Can accommodate, may interests, GSOH.
Box Number P20166 ,
Express and Star,
Queen Street,
Wolverhampton, WV1 1ES.

general

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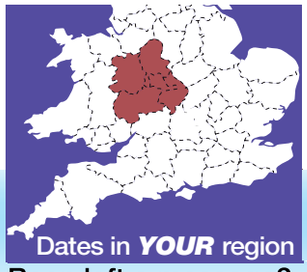

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To ***Reply*** to members from your landline call:
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calls cost £1.55 per min plus your phone company's access charge.

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Or ***Text...*** **REPLY26** (leave space) box number (leave space) and then enter your message & send to **80098** eg: **REPLY26** 123456 **hi get in touch...** then send to **80098** Successfully forwarded messages cost £1.50 per message (Max 160 characters). You must exchange 7 messages each before you can swap contact details. Messages may be moderated for your safety and security.

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Women seeking men

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SAMANTHA, 42yrs, seeks gent for festive season, doesn't want to be along again. Age/looks unimportant, GSOH essential. **Box: 4140774. Text only.**

YVONNE, single mum, happy with life, but would like to meet someone to share fun times with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420269**

KATIE 35yrs, slender well educated brunette seeks no strings mutual pleasure with gent 40+ Must be discreet, married or single. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3003 Box 419673**

JACKIE lonely and looking for male company, 48-65. Need a bit of love and affection? Then I'm your girl. call me. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418169**

DISCREET man wanted by married lady for no strings fun. I'm called Sarah and am 37yrs. Pls call, ACA. **Tel No: 0906 515 3007 Box 418167**

LYN, 43, divorced very lonely single mum, young looking, slim, attractive, WLTM similar male for companionship. Age/looks/Status unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418795**

JANE, young 41, very broadminded seeks chap any age for discreet no strings fun, any age, no time wasters ACA. **Tel: No: 0906 515 3011 Box: 409715**

SUSANNAH, 48, curvy female, romantic, warm and cuddly, seeks similar kind male for a loving relationship with lots of cuddles and kisses. Looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417341**

MAUREEN, discreet sensual lady, 42yrs seeks daytime fun at her home. ACA. **Tel: 0906 515 3015 Box: 405297**

LUCY, 32, blonde, tall and slim, looking for a casual fling, nothing serious. Discretion needed and assured. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420237**

SOPHIA young 40yrs, married but bored, seeks discreet adult fun, any area, all calls answered. **Tel: 0906 515 3019 Box: 413399**

SARAH, curvaceous brunette, 35, passionate nature, solvent, OHAC, WLTM date again, looking for male to take me out. Looks/Age unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420207**

FELICITY, 38yrs, attractive, petite but shapely lady seeks gent for indoor activities! Age/looks/marital status unimportant but must be discreet and non demanding. **Tel: 0906 515 3023 Box 420235**

KELLY young attractive vivacious 48yr old lady, loves good food, cosy nights in/out, holidays etc, WLTM male for mutual companionship **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420195**

39 yr old independent single Mom, knows the benefit of having a good man in the picture. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5084796**

JANE, 47, voluptuous female, long hair, brown eyes, generous curves, would love to spend cosy nights in with that special male. Age/looks unimportant, **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417985**

CATHY, 42, good looking brunette with a real passion for life, seeking male for happy times, dates, chats, romance and more. Pls call. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420175**

TARA 22 tall slim but curvy with legs that go all the way up to heaven, WLTM very appreciative confident male for adult fun. Contact me anytime. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 414701**

FEMALE, dark haired 5'10, curvy, likes reading, walking, cinema, seeks male 40-50 for lasting relationship. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5077545**

PROFESSIONAL black female age 52, enjoys evenings and days out, would like to meet similar Midlands male. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5315901**

CATHY, 42, good looking brunette with a real passion for life, seeking male for happy times, dates, chats, romance and more. Pls call. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420073**

FEMALE fun brunette, attractive, 26, seeking male for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416287**

MAGGIE, 72 yrs young, good sense of humour, well presented, WLTM kind, sincere chappie to share coffee and a chat. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5310040**

LOUISE 35, dark hair, blue eyes, attractive ex air hostess, looking for fun times with older male for romantic nights in and more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420043**

FRANCES, 45, busty female, loves nights in/out, seeking uncomplicated male who can occupy my free time for quality companionship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420003**

MARY, pretty, friendly, lots of fun, lives in Kidderminster, loves the theatre, opera, ballet, WLTM a lovely, charming, funny, genuine guy, 30s, to settle down with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419883**

LOU, 45, lives in Shrewsbury, WLTM a lady between 42-49 with blue eyes, must be kind, caring and funny to mend my broken heart, someone who likes to curl up on the sofa for cozy nights in. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419855**

FREYA 24yr old single mum, looking for male for free time frolics, call me if you're interested, it could be fun! **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419851**

LISA 38 slim attractive blonde, looking for a man who will appreciate a feminine, fashionable, fun, romantic sensual woman with a mind of her own. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419839**

SARAH 38, slim, nice looking, sensual, tactile, no ties, WLTM kind, loving male to enjoy affectionate relationship. Any age/looks. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419821**

PAT 66, attractive, N/S, likes reading, nights out, seeks gent for friendship, days out and more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418277**

68YR old widow, attractive, seeks sincere, N/S male, likes reading, meals out and walks. West Midlands. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 414773**

JULIA 47, looking for genuine, reasonably attractive male friend, may to lead to more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419695**

LADY Penelope seeks her very own Parker (47-58) to go on a voyage of discovery and romance. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4550237**

BLACK lady seeks white male over 60, any location, for friendship and hopefully a lot more. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4256384**

REMEMBER: Calls cost £1.55 per minute plus your phone company's access charge. Texts cost £1.50 per message received.

CHARLENE, 24, petite curvy young blonde seeks similar cheeky, fun loving guy for lots of fun and loving. ACA. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419597**

JOANNA, 36, petite, auburn haired female, lovely figure seeks loving older male for fun nights out and cosy nights in. Maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419595**

SHARON 32, attractive black single mum of one, very tactile and passionate, WLTM male 45-65yrs for fun meets. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419579**

MARIE, 43, fun blue-eyed brunette, fit and active, seeks similar male to have a laugh with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419417**

KAREN 50, widow, likes swimming, horse riding, keep fit, clay pigeon shooting, GSOH, N/S, non drinker, seeks male. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 415211**

CURVY, farm girl at heart, 32, 5ft 10, single mum, caring, kind, shy, likes walks, cooking WLTM tactile male farmer for LTR. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5067001**

FEMALE medium build, blonde hair, 5ft 5ins, seeks male, 50-58, GSOH, loving, caring and understanding. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 415429**

WIDOW 50, blonde hair, GSOH, 5ft 5ins, slim, seeks male. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 415767**

MARIE, 43, fun blue-eyed brunette, fit and active, seeks similar male to have a laugh with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419417**

FEMALE 50's, 5ft 5ins, blonde hair, blue eyes, slim, seeks gent with GSOH, loving, caring and understanding. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 415871**

BLUE eyed female, blonde hair, slim, GSOH, loving, caring, understanding, seeking similar male, 55-55. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416989**

AMANDA, 36, tall, slim, busty brunette seeks man, any age, any area, for discreet daytime fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418117**

CAROL Ann, sensitive slim brunette very romantic seeks tall handsome male for fun, friendship and lots of TLC. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419385**

KIRSTEN, 36, attractive, blonde and very bored, seeking open-minded decent male for fun/friendship, 40-60yrs. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419383**

VAL 41, pretty, cuddly, flirty, seeks similar fun loving male for an uncomplicated no strings relationship. Age/looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416601**

MID naughty forties female looking fun, thrills and discreet meets, give me a call, you wont be disappointed. Any age with own accommodation. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 409109**

DIVORCED female, attractive, sensual by nature, OHAC, bored with own company, looking to make life a little more exciting with likeminded man. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419219**

LINDA, 47, brown-eyed blonde, caring, loving and honest, many interests, seeks genuine male to share lonely evenings with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417211**

JOYCE, affectionate sensitive widow, bit of a romantic, seeks loving male for lots of TLC. Looks unimportant, it's what's in the heart that matters. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419143**

DEBBIE, 29, looking for mature professional fun guy, 40-50 to spend good times with. Call me, you have nothing to lose. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419075**

FEMALE fun brunette, attractive, 26, seeking male for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416287**

JULES, sensitive tactile, curvy brunette, hopeless romantic, seeks tall, loving male for fun, friendship and possible LTR. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419033**

VIRGINIA, outgoing social female, 24, tall slim and attractive, looking for fun times, maybe more. Can accommodate/travel. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418845**

HEATHER, well travelled solvent brunette looking to share a large glass of wine and whatever follows with affectionate man friend. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419031**

PAULINE, 49yrs, very attractive, curvy divorcee, affectionate and fun, seeks laid back, sincere male for an uncomplicated, loving relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418925**

LADY young at heart, nice eyes, seeks man 42-52 with good sense of humour. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4881572**

VIRGINIA, outgoing social female, 24, tall slim and attractive, looking for fun times, maybe more. Can accommodate/travel. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418845**

LOOKING for the right chemistry with country loving gent who like me is looking for some extra fun in their life. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418843**

JAN 35yr old blue eyed blonde, outgoing, friendly, WLTM passionate guy to share good wine, good conversation, flirting and fun times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418609**

ATTRACTIVE professional lady, widow, 50's, likes walks, sight seeing, theatre, meals out, seeks genuine, professional gent, 5ft 9ins plus to make life more enjoyable. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418615**

JAN 35yr old blue eyed blonde, outgoing, friendly, WLTM passionate guy to share good wine, good conversation, flirting and fun times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418609**

SENSUAL tactile, attractive female, long blonde hair, blue eyes, loves travel, wining/dining, WLTM genuine male for mutual companionship. Looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418587**

BROKEN hearted lady 39 seeks loving male to mend heart age 39/40. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4869116**

KAY, very young 45, fit and active, no ties, seeks similar young at heart, fun male for fun meets. Age/Status/looks unimportant. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418577**

VIVACIOUS strawberry blonde who knows just what she wants, looking for caring male for spontaneous fun relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418445**

WENDY, 40, slim, fit, bubbly female looking to meet a tall, slim, fit, mature male who thinks he can keep up. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418369**

JO 55, curvy redhead, loves eating out, theatre, travel, looking for middle-aged prince charming to sweep me off my feet. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4464905**

GENUINE lady looking for genuine male, age 58-60, for friendship and to have a laugh with. So if that's you would love to hear from you. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4537136**

PAT 66, attractive, N/S, likes reading, nights out, seeks gent for friendship, days out and more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418277**

68YR old widow, attractive, seeks sincere, N/S male, likes reading, meals out and walks. West Midlands. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 414773**

WENDY, 40, slim, fit, bubbly female looking to meet a tall, slim, fit, mature male who thinks he can keep up. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418369**

EILEEN, slim green eyed brunette likes meals out and cosy nights in, seeks tall male who would make her laugh and brighten up her day. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418347**

FEMALE fun brunette, attractive, 26, seeking male for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 416287**

FEMALE seeking gent 55-70, down to earth, nice and intelligent who knows how to treat a lady. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417195**

YOUNG early 40's female, GSOH, kind, caring, considerate, seeks male for friendship, possible romance. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 410847**

CAROL 49, attractive, green eyed blonde, honest warm hearted, n/s with GSOH likes cinema, music, walking, meals out and travel seeking similar male. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4283683**

FEMALE, 50, short blond hair, blue eyes, 5ft 10, slim build, looking for a man 50- 55 with salt and pepper hair and GSOH. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4435776**

HEATHER, 34, single very attractive brunette, sensual and interesting, looking to add to life's experiences and adventures with professional male. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418193**

Men seeking women

REMEMBER: Calls cost £1.55 per minute plus your phone company's access charge. Texts cost £1.50 per message received.

WAYNE, 40, cheeky, good career, likes gym. Looking for a lady who likes stimulating conversation and times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419829**

DARREN, 44, slim build, dark brown hair, green eyes, seeks genuine female for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418809**

COLIN 48, seeks cuddly large big beautiful woman 45 to 55 for LTR, love, romance, hopefully likes cuddles, kisses, holding hands. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5308886**

52YRS old guy genuine down to earth looking for Mrs right for nights in and out, walking, cooking, lives life to the full. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5331215**

MALE looking to meet a nice lady for fun times to spend with. I am 72 and would like to meet a lady between 60 and 70. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5332896**

PHILLIP, 29 years old, 5ft 11ins, stocky build, green eyes, friendly, GSOH, seeks genuine friendly n/s female for friendship, possible relationship. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5335424**

PHIL, 58, slim, OHAC, from Wolverhampton, looking for a fun lady for a no-strings relationship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420265**

GENUINE 56yr old male, divorced, OHAC, looking for nice lady for friendship, maybe more. Wolverhampton. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 405551**

CARING male, 57, OHAC, looking for female, any race, status and age for no strings discreet fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 411461**

STEVE 39, 5ft 9ins, medium build, likes walks, seeks female, slim-medium build, single mum welcome. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 396709**

PHIL 55, divorced, 5ft 10ins, slim, OHAC, seeks female, 18 plus for discreet adult fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 401875**

GENUINE male, 58, OHAC, looking for fun lady for no strings fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417601PHIL** 57, OHAC, discreet, seeks no strings fun with younger female. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 414991**

ADVENTUROUS 35yr old, slim, dark hair, likes music, cycling and photography, seeks female for friendship, maybe more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417235**

MATURE male, 50, medium-build, varied interests, seeks true Christian female, 35-45, who enjoys evenings in and dining out, for friendship or possibly more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419283**

TALL attractive male, 55, would like to meet older mature women 60 to 75 for close discreet fun. You only live once. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4347071**

I am an easygoing guy looking for a female 55-66 for a meaningful relationship. I am very sincere and honest. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5326234**

MALE, 70, retired from NHS, seeking a lady for friendship and companionship. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420147**

WIDOWER 70 plus, seeking female for friendship. Love me love my dog. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417439**

VERY useful, attractive 58 yr old, GSOH, six foot tall, nice build, n/s, genuine, tactile, fit and sporty, looking for a women for nights in and out. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420135**

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COLIN, five foot eight, blue eyes, bundle of fun to be around, likes growing fuchsias for showing, vintage tractor for showing, weekends away, going out and staying in WLTM a lady for friendship/LTR. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 420089**

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6FT well built guy, nicely groomed looking for fun intimate nights or day with slim/medium build attractive lady 35-55. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5132460**

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WIDOWER, quiet, easygoing, slim, 5ft 7 tall, smart, varied interests, seeks slimish lady, 50 to 65 yrs for caring relationship. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4906469**

TIM, easygoing honest male, discreet, uninhibited, seeks similar non-conformist averagely attractive, N/S female up to 65. Notts. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 375065**

SUBMISSIVE 44year old WLTM dominant female 25-30 years who enjoys role play with friendship and maybe possible relationship. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5084114**

COLIN 61, lorry driver, 5'10", blue eyes, kind hearted, romantic, hobbies include growing fuchsia's for showing and I have a vintage tractor that I play with from time to time. Looking for similar who's up for a lot of fun. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418463**

MARK 40, 5ft 9ins, brown hair/eyes, attractive, good looking, OHAC/business, likes walks, day trips, cinema, seeks similar female. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 348239**

PROFESSIONAL male, 41, own business, likes to enjoy life, clubs, pubs, cinema, gym, seeks similar female. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 360283**

GENT 55, slightly mad, but not bad, will make you glad you answered his ad! **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 408973**

PAUL 50yrs, Birmingham, with own house and own car, I have a good sense of humour and I like going out, I'm looking for the right girl for friendship/relationship. Call me when you can. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418465**

MALE 45yrs old, self-employed motor trader/mechanic, medium build, green eyes, average looks. I am a nice genuine and honest person looking for similar lady to share a honest permanent relationship and happy times. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 418709**

MIKE late 60's fit, active, genuine and generous, very passive seeks assertive lady any age / looks for mutual benefits. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4747481**

STOCKY, bold, unhappily married man, seeks similar very discreet female for exciting rendezvous. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4757315**

ATTRACTIVE tall black male would like to meet female for day time fun and discreet meetings, any age or location. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5077442**

MATURE male, 50, medium-build, varied interests, seeks true Christian female, 35-45, who enjoys evenings in and dining out, for friendship or possibly more. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419283**

GENTLEMAN, 57, slightly mad but not bad, who will make you ever so glad that you answered his ad! **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419307**

JAMES GSOH, likes theatre, meals out, socialising, seeking easy going female, 35-55. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 417469**

PETE 47, enjoys walking, meals out, seeks female, age/looks/status unimportant, with similar interests for adult fun text only. **Text only to Mailbox no: 5063152**

MALE 60s WLTM genuine fun lady, 50/60s nights in or out, likes swimming, walks, music, good food etc for friendship or more. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4852727**

TIM, easygoing honest male, discreet, uninhibited, seeks similar non-conformist averagely attractive, N/S female up to 65. Notts. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 375065**

LEE, 50, seeking an Asian female for discreet fun and maybe more. Dudley area. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 419401**

Men seeking men

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BI male, single widower, 58, seeks gay male friends near Tamworth. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4355756**

BI curious Gloucester guy 36, slim, married, WLTM gay or bi male aged 60 to 75 for fun times. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4930039**

BI male would like to meet same. 60 to 80 yrs. Must be able to accommodate. Coventry or Birmingham. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4931168**

TALL male 57, seeks older male 60 to 80 for adult fun. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4347071**

TOM young 59 attractive male, decent looking, fit, slimmish, good company & fun loving with many interests, seeking similar male. **Text only to Mailbox no: 4926340**

Women seeking Women

LONELY mother seeks female friends for enlivening/enlightening coffee chats, likes countryside animals etc. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4860241**

ATTRACTIVE full figure bi lady 58 seeks female of similar age for fun times. Cotswold area. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4636475**

36YR attractive black curvy female seeking boyish female local for relationship. **Text only to Mailbox No: 4483526**

Friends

LUKE 60's, seeking young Asian friend, 20-30's to socialise with. **Tel No: 0906 500 3955 Box No: 414841**

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Sandwell Chronicle Thursday, December 17, 2015

RX five-star safety rating

By Anthony Martyn

The new Lexus RX has achieved the top five-star ranking in independent Euro NCAP crash testing. The results also mark the highest test score for pedestrian protection yet achieved by any SUV – large or small.

Euro NCAP made special mention of the 79 per cent recorded by the RX in pedestrian impact testing, which included a maximum points score for leg and pelvic region protection and a notably high result for head protection.

In fact, the new RX goes even further to reduce the risk of accidents with pedestrians, beyond the boundaries of Euro NCAP's current research.

Its Lexus Safety System+ package of active safety and driver assistance features (provided as standard on all RX versions) includes a Pre-Crash Safety system with a pedestrian detection function.

This means that, across a wide range of speeds, the RX will recognise the risk of a collision with a pedestrian in its path, alert the driver and prepare the brakes to deliver maximum stopping power.

And should the driver fail to take action, autonomous emergency braking will be triggered.

Performance

Euro NCAP will begin assessing this type of system during next year, so at present it has no impact in the new RX's overall performance.

Lexus Safety System+ also provides:

- Adaptive Cruise Control, which helps keep the car a safe distance from the car in front, adjusting to even very low speeds in busy traffic.
- Lane Departure Alert/Lane Keep Assist, which monitors lane markings and warns the driver if the RX moves out of lane without the turn indicators being used, adding brief weight to the steering to help a return to the correct course.
- Road Sign Assist, which recognises principal motorway and major road warning and command signs and repeats them on the driver's multi-information display.
- Automatic High Beam, which picks up the lights of oncoming traffic and vehicles ahead and automatically switches to and from high beam to maintain the best forward illumination without the risk of dazzling others (the more sophisticated Adaptive High-beam System on Premier grade models adjusts the pattern of high beam lighting).

The results also mark the highest test score for pedestrian protection yet achieved by any SUV – large or small.

The new RX also offers a blind spot mitor, rear cross traffic alert and a 360-degree panoramic view monitor, to help the driver achieve a true all-round view of the car's surroundings and nearby vehicles and hazards.

A sway warning detects erratic driving behaviour indicating driver drowsiness or inattention and prompts an alert that driver might want to take a break from the wheel.

The vehicle's excellent impact performance can be credited to the exceptional strength of its bodyshell. This makes extensive use of strong but lightweight high-tensile steel and a design that's effective in absorbing impact forces and channelling them away from the cabin.

Advanced laser screw welding and adhesive bonding techniques add to the car's high rigidity and robustness, qualities that also contribute to its stable and rewarding handling.

Brummies bring home Bacon

Tom Bacon has signed for the Brummies

BIRMINGHAM have completed the signing of talented youngster Tom Bacon.

The 22-year-old impressed during his first full season of competitive racing in the National League and was voted Mildenhall's Rider of the Year.

Bacon was one of the most consistent visitors to Perry Barr in 2015 averaging a figure of just over nine-points from three meetings.

However, he comes in on a modest 4.42 average and team manager Graham Drury has described it as a key signing.

Said Drury: "There were a number of clubs interested in Tom and to be the club he wanted to join says a lot for Birmingham Speedway.

"Tom is the sort of character who is going to go down really well with our supporters - he's a talented, promising speedway rider and on top of that he's a well mannered, polite young man too.

"I believe he is going to have a big year for us and I'm confident he'll be a solid, consistent scorer for the team."

Bacon himself has described the move as "a dream come true" and is determined to help the Brummies successfully defend their National League crown.

Bacon said: "Since riding at Perry Barr in a few meetings last season, Birmingham was the club I always wanted to race for next year."

Clubs are against league shake-up

A RADICAL plan to shake-up the Birmingham & District Cricket League's structure has been opposed by its clubs.

The league's management committee had put forward a proposal which would have seen the bottom division – Division Three – scrapped at the end of the 2017 season.

But it was unanimously opposed by the 12 clubs who are set to form the division next year, during a meeting held at Fordhouses Cricket Club earlier this week.

"Every team in the division has fought tooth and nail to be in the Birmingham League," explained Fordhouses skipper Chris Guest.

"It is not something we want to give up."

Under the proposals, the league would have been left with three divisions – Premier, One and Two – with the 12 clubs from Division Three being placed in their respective feeder leagues in Staffordshire, Shropshire, Warwickshire and Worcestershire.

Dissatisfaction

It followed a recent National Playing Survey which found growing player dissatisfaction with the amount of travel and the length of the games compared to higher divisions. But Guest said: "I think the questions asked in the survey meant those kind of findings were inevitable.

"I don't know anyone who, faced with a question over whether they would like to travel less, is going to answer no.

"In reality, the travel is not a massive issue. As a club, we have aspirations of playing in the Birmingham League at a higher level – that is what we are building toward. You just have to accept the travel as part of it all.

"In terms of reducing it or increasing the competitiveness of the league, I don't see how removing a division changes that.

"You are always going to have players at a lower level being paid by the clubs. That is just how things are."

The issue will now be discussed by the league's management committee on Monday.

They are likely to decide whether to proceed with the proposal, make amendments or scrap it altogether.

Blues stem losing streak at Boro

Gary Rowett's men frustrated their hosts and ended a losing streak into the bargain

Middlesbrough 0 Blues 0

BLUES ended their three-match losing streak in the Championship with a battling draw at promotion-chasing Middlesbrough.

Gary Rowett's side frustrated second-placed Boro to claim their first point in over a month, denying the Teessiders their fourth consecutive league win.

Aitor Karanka's men managed to keep hold of their automatic promotion spot, but David Nugent was sent off late on to round off a disappointing afternoon.

Boro started brightly and almost took the lead in the second minute when Emilio Nsue burst forward down the right before laying off for Adam Clayton, whose delicate chip was turned round the post by Blues goalkeeper Tomasz Kuszczak.

The home side had another good chance four minutes later when Albert Adomah broke down the left and clipped a good ball into the box, but Stewart Downing's poor header was well wide.

City pushed forward shortly after and once Boro failed to clear a cross, the ball fell to Stephen Gleeson whose shot skidded just wide.

Dimi Konstantopoulos did well to block Demarai Gray's effort.

'Warrior spirit' of Okore is welcome

REMI GARDE has hailed the 'warrior spirit' of returning defender Jores Okore as the perfect addition to Villa's scrap for Premier League survival.

The Villa boss said he was immediately impressed by Okore's tenacity in training after the 23-year-old returned from knee surgery which has kept him out of the side since the summer.

Denmark international Okore was back in the starting line-up for Saturday's draw at Southampton following a suspension for Ciaran Clarke and skipper Micah Richards being ruled out by injury. And Garde said he had been impressed by the attitude shown by Okore.

"Jores gives the spirit you want – like a warrior," enthused the Villa boss.

"It was not easy for him since the Cup Final because he's had some problems with his knees. It's never easy. But I discovered Jores as a competitor as soon as I came to the training ground. I am happy for him and for the team, also. He did very well in the last game."

Garde said he is in the enviable position of at last having serious competition for places in the middle of the defence, with Richards, Joleon Lescott and Clark all likely to be available for Sunday's lunchtime kick-off against Arsenal.

He added: "It's good – good for the team. Before competing with the opponent, you have to have this kind of competition between your own players because it's important that they feel that everybody can be useful for the team."

And while the Frenchman central defensive options have been boosted, his rumoured interest in Ashley Cole received a lift.

Celtic have their eye on Villa's Kozak

CELTIC have admitted their interest in Villa striker Libor Kozak but said there is no bid imminent.

Bhoys assistant boss John Collins confirmed manager Ronny Deila watched the Czech frontman in the under-21s victory over Derby County at Villa Park on Monday night.

Kozak, who has been frozen out under both Tim Sherwood and Remi Garde this season scored a brace in the game.

Collins said: "Ronny went down and had a look at the game and of course he [Kozak] scored a couple of goals but there's nothing imminent.

"We're looking to strengthen all over to be honest."

However, Celtic look likely to return with a bid for the former Lazio striker in January after failing to tempt him in the summer.

Striker Nabi is endorsed by former Prem stars

TWO former Premier League stars have backed Albion striker Adil Nabi to make a name for himself in the top flight.

New team-mates Florent Malouda and John Arne Riise have both been impressed with the 21-year-old since he joined them on loan at Delhi Dynamos.

Although Nabi was initially unable to get into the team, three goals in his last four games have helped Roberto Carlos's side qualify for the semi-finals.

"Adil is a good, technical striker," said ex-Liverpool left-back Riise. "He's a great finisher and as his confidence and fitness builds he'll go on to be very good.

"He's very young but he was voted West Brom's best young player last year.

"He's got some amazing skills and he's going to be a top, top player."

Malouda has also tipped Nabi to force his way into contention at Albion when he returns home later this month.

And the former Chelsea winger thinks his success in India could pave the way for more British youngsters to make the journey.

Nabi was the first player from a Premier League club to go on loan to a team in the Indian Super League, which is only in its second season.

"I think Nabi has a bright future in the game in England," said Malouda.

"He's a good young player with a lot of skill. He has quick feet and is very good in front of goal.

"You have to be patient and keep working hard. This is a different kind of opportunity for him."

Albion team give boost to colitis charity

DARREN FLETCHER and the Albion team have been promoting Crohn's & Colitis UK, a charity that's close to the captain's heart.

Fletcher was sidelined for the best part of two years at Manchester United with ulcerative colitis – a form of inflammatory bowel disease – but has made a full recovery since surgery in 2013.

Revealing that he still speaks regularly to people with the illness, seeing Fletcher back on the football pitch has been inspirational to some young sufferers.

"I've been there and I know how devastating an illness it is," said the Scottish midfielder.

"It's important that, having returned to playing, I show people who are suffering with it that there is light at the end of the tunnel."

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Sport

Clubs are against cricket shake up

Page 35

Brummies bring home Bacon

Page 35

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Jonny most impressive, says Olsson

EACH week Jonny Evans finds new ways of impressing his teammates, says Jonas Olsson.

The summer signing from Manchester United has quietly turned into one of the buys of the season, putting in consistently-impressive performances at centre-half.

In the past two weeks head coach Tony Pulis has asked the 27-year-old to play out of position, but on both occasions Evans has taken to his new role like a duck to water.

He looked like a seasoned midfielder in the holding role against Spurs last weekend, and his versatility has wowed others at the club.

"For me, he's an excellent footballer," said Olsson. "He can play in all positions.

"He played left-back against West Ham. Before that he played centre-half with me of course, and now central midfield.

"That's a testament of being a really good footballer, if you can play in any position on the pitch."

Evans has given Pulis a solution to two suspension headaches. If he can, the head coach likes to make as few changes as possible, so the Northern Irishman has proved invaluable. Olsson himself has benefitted from the reshuffle, keeping his place at centre-back because Evans has moved elsewhere.

However, it would be wrong to suggest the Swede hasn't done enough himself to stay in the side after being brought in to cover Gareth McAuley's one-match ban.

He's restricted two of the league's in-form strikers – Olivier Giroud and Harry Kane – to negligible influences in the last two home games. "I've started three games on the bounce and I feel good," he said. "I'm looking forward to the games leading into Christmas."

Villa could get a new chairman if club stays unsold

VILLA are set to appoint a new chairman and another board member should the club not find a buyer, according to their website.

A report from a meeting on Sunday between fans' representatives and Villa chief executive Tom Fox said the move follows a statement from owner Randy Lerner that a new chairman would be appointed should the owner be unable to find a new buyer.

A report on the website of the Aston Villa Supporters' Trust states: "Tom (Fox) advised the announcement of the new chairman would be made imminently, as well as that of the appointment of an additional board member."

It is not known whether the appointment would be internal or external.

The report also claims Fox addressed the issue of Villa's much-maligned 'transfer committee' – stating the club's dealings in the transfer market were always driven by the manager.

There had been claims since the sacking of Tim Sherwood that the former boss had been unhappy about the quality of signings made in the summer.

Arsenal put another nail in Villa's coffin

Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and Joleon Lescott

Football

Villa 0 Arsenal 2

A sinking Villa became the latest victims of an Arsenal side who moved top of the Premier League by clinically dispatching their hapless hosts.

Olivier Giroud's penalty and Aaron Ramsey's tap-in sent them to the summit, a point ahead of Manchester City and Leicester, following a 2-0 win.

Arsenal's win , rarely looked in doubt once the Gunners grabbed an eighth-minute lead.

The returning Theo Walcott, in for Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain, outpaced Alan Hutton on the Villa right and tangled with the Scotland international in the area for a penalty. Giroud sent Brad Guzan the wrong way for his 50th league goal for Arsenal.

The hosts at least started the second half with renewed vigour.

Cech claimed Carlos Sanchez's 30-yard strike and Jordan Veretout shot over before Gestede glanced a header wide.

Scott Sinclair then wasted a golden chance on 57 minutes when he planted an unmarked header over from six yards.

CRUEL BLOW FOR ALBION

Liverpool 2 Albion 2

IT was a cruel way to win a point at Anfield, but in the cold light of day Albion will be happy with their draw.

Divock Origi's 96th-minute equaliser only went in because it ballooned off Gareth McAuley and sent Boaz Myhill the wrong way.

Up until that point the Welsh keeper had been superb, beating away shot after shot as Liverpool attempted in vain to take the chances they kept creating.

Jurgen Klopp's side had 28 shots to Albion's four, so it is startling then that the Baggies were two minutes away from picking up their third win at Anfield in five seasons.

Even more startling is that Albion's fans and players came away from the North West disappointed.

There's no question that Liverpool deserved something from the game, but Salomon Rondon had a golden opportunity to seal the victory minutes before Origi's late blow. For all of the Venezuelan's tireless running and hard work, it is now three weeks in a row that he has spurned chances to turn one point into three.

Incredible

Albion are on an incredible unbeaten run of four games against some of the best teams in the league. But, amazingly, we should be talking about a run of four victories.

What's worrying is that when James McClean put Rondon through in the 87th minute he didn't even manage to hit the target. Tony Pulis is a fan of Rondon's workrate, but how much longer will he put up with such shoddy finishing with Saido Berahino and Rickie Lambert on the bench?

Both have their downfalls but there's no question they both can finish. Up until the 96th minute it had been the perfect away performance, if a tad lucky. Although Liverpool rained shot after shot down on Myhill's goal, Albion had two spells of pressure, one in each half.

Crucially, they scored during both. With Rondon misfiring, Chris Brunt's set-pieces are becoming Albion's main threat.

When you have defensive goliaths such as Jonas Olsson, Gareth McAuley and Craig Dawson in your team, there's no wonder.

Dejan Lovren jumps with Gareth McAuley during the Premiership match at Anfield

Olsson has come close to scoring the last few weeks. He hit the bar against Arsenal and was denied by a Hugo Lloris wonder-save last week.

It's a good job Jonny Evans is so versatile and can play holding midfield, because at the moment Olsson is boss Pulis's main goal threat.

He even had the ball in the net twice at Anfield, but referee Craig Pawson eventually ruled out his effort on the stroke of half-time for offside. It was the right decision, but it came about in a confusing way. Darren Fletcher had another tidy game in the heart of midfield.

Albion's captain is so assured on the ball, watching him for 90 minutes it becomes obvious why Sir Alex Ferguson used him as Manchester United's passing metronome.

Shuttling the ball from back to front, left to right, Fletcher rarely loses possession.

Craig Gardner would love to play central midfield but for now he's being restricted to playing on the right.

He's not many Albion fans' favourite player but – apart from the reckless tackle on Dejan Lovren – Gardner had another good game to back up an impressive performance from the bench against Spurs. Albion are 13th in the league.

Saido is just wasting time, says Bomber

ALBION legend Tony Brown says Saido Berahino is 'wasting his career' but others think head coach Tony Pulis is 'ruining' the young striker.

Bomber Brown wants Berahino – who played for the under-21s against Swansea at Tamworth's Lamb Ground last night – to give more in training in order to force himself into the team.

"He's got a great gift of scoring goals and there's not a lot of players that have got that ability," said Brown, who himself netted 279 times for the club.

"He's got it, we've all seen it, and while he's sitting on the bench he's not able to fulfil his potential and go on and score goals. He's ruining his own career."

Berahino has been on the bench for the last five games, and hasn't featured at all in the last three.

"But Albion are on a four-match unbeaten run and don't appear to be missing last season's top scorer.

"I don't know what's going on behind the scenes in training, " said Brown. "But when you're not in the side you should go every day into training performing your best, putting every effort you can into training to try and catch the manager's eye and say 'this is what I'm doing, I'm working my hardest'."

Albion's all-time record scorer doesn't think other clubs will be put off by Berahino's stint out of the starting XI.

"Everybody's looking for goalscorers at the moment and if you look at Saido from the outside, you probably look at what he did last season and say he can score goals," said Brown.

Not everyone agrees with Bomber. Former Newcastle, Coventry and Portsmouth striker Micky Quinn thinks Pulis's style of play is to blame for the striker's lack of form this season.

Jackett holds high hopes for new blood

KENNY Jackett says Wolves have 'high hopes' for the current crop of youngsters making their mark with the club.

The Wolves starlets beat Manchester United 3-2 in the league on Saturday to follow up their impressive FA Youth Cup win over MK Dons and an 8-0 thrashing of league leaders Everton.

The likes of Niall Ennis, Connor Ronan and Nicu Carnat have been touted as potential future stars.

And Jackett said there was a good chance that some of the side could follow in the footsteps of the likes of Carl Ikeme and Danny Batth, currently regulars in the first team.

★★★

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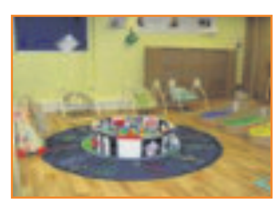

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